

IN PRAISE OF DEBT: AFFECTIVE ECONOMICS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH
LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Lauren Garrett: In Praise of Debt: Affective Economics in Early Modern English Literature
(Under the direction Mary Floyd-Wilson)

This dissertation examines texts that thematize the crises of trust resulting from the pressures of early modern England's expanding credit economy. A century before the founding of the Bank of England, early modern credit remained an emotive and moral currency, presumably dependent on affective ties, moral obligations, knowledge of a potential debtor's character and a concern for their well-being. And yet, in this period of widespread mobility, immigration, urbanization, conspicuous consumption, and heightened levels of debt litigation, creditors and debtors were often strangers bound only by a legal bond that carried penalties of surprising severity.

At this critical moment of emerging capitalistic practices and their attendant social and moral disruptions, Elizabethan and Jacobean authors are drawn to the discursive interplay between the legal problem of debt and those debts of love and social obligation it threatened. As an emerging ethos shaped by market relations and commercial culture pervades, complicates, and reconfigures traditional structures of affective relations – Christian fellowship, friendship, marriage, kinship, and service – early modern writers exploit the age-old interdependence of economic and moral discourses. The resulting discourse of debt is characterized by a strategic slippage between debt's economic and emotive registers. The texts included in this study deploy this discourse to achieve ends at once self-interested and moralistic. Some debtors use the

discourse to perpetually defer payment by reorganizing their debt relations, while others use it to resist disenfranchisement by reorienting the basis of credibility. Through its inscription into law with the 1571 Act Against Usury, this discourse enables the advancement of predatory lending as an acceptable violation of traditional social obligations. At the same time, its inscription into genres such as city comedy and domestic tragedy show the discourse to be a rhetorical antidote for the worst excesses of both economic and affective debt relations. On a broader scale, this project reveals a relationship between economic and affective bonds that is more complex than we have previously understood. As the two begin to move towards increasingly distinct fields, the implications of their shared rhetorical and conceptual basis become imbued with an unprecedented signifying power for social intervention.

To Django, my partner in all things.

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INTRODUCTION
“Thou owest me thy love”: Falstaffian Debt

“The very fact that we don’t know what debt is, the very flexibility of the concept, is the basis of its power.”

-David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*

“At bottom, perhaps all economic criticism is founded upon a faith in universal equivalents: our ‘gold standard’ is a belief in the comparability of different cultural systems.”

-Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen,
New Economic Criticism

In Shakespeare’s *1 Henry IV*, Mistress Quickly informs Hal that Falstaff has publically claimed the prince owes him a thousand pounds. The implication here is that Falstaff has been using his relationship with the heir apparent to generate lines of credit to fund his sack and capon habit. When Hal confronts Falstaff with this fraudulent debt, the old knight dodges his lie by appealing to a higher obligation between them: “A thousand pound, Hal? A million! Thy love is worth a million; thou owest me thy love” (3.3.123-124).¹ The ease with which Falstaff converts friendship into credit, and debt back into affective obligation, points to a continuity between affection and economics that Falstaff at once manipulates for his own interests and insists upon with surprising moral sincerity. This rhetorical trick is the crux of Falstaff’s paradoxical function as both a vice figure and, for me, the *Henriad*’s unlikely moral center. How should we understand this rhetorical sliding scale between debt’s monetary values on the one hand and its emotional and spiritual components on the other? Is it all rhetorical trickery, witty improvisation inspired by the pressures of a credit economy? Or do these rhetorical maneuvers also serve a

¹ *1 Henry IV*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 1147-1224. References are to act, scene, and line, here and hereafter cited in the text.

moral function, pushing back against emerging forms of fiscal obligation with the debts of love and service threatened by a new economic order? Can Falstaff's dodge be read as a genuine reflection on those debts that underwrite social relations beyond those defined by the logic of payment and penalty? What is the relationship between presumably temporal economic debts that make a virtue of payment and those perpetual emotional and spiritual debts that are valued by their continuation?

Once Falstaff called my attention to this rhetorical move, I began to find it throughout the literature of the period: in paradoxical encomia, collections of verse, comedies, tragedies, tragicomedies, sermons, debtors' petitions, treatises on the social problem of debt. Confronted with the recurrence of this rhetorical confluence in the language of indebtedness, I set out to understand why so many Elizabethan and Jacobean authors were playing around with this particular rhetorical trick. Were authors employing this discursive move to similar or different effects? What kinds of problems – economic, moral, or textual – did it help authors and their characters to solve? To what degree did this rhetorical slippery slope reflect a conceptual or practical interaction between debt of love and debt of money?

What I found, and what I will attempt to develop across the five chapters of this study, is evidence of a crucial cultural moment in the history of debt as a social and economic form. As chapter one will show, traditional orthodoxy, drawing on classical and biblical discourses, held extensive indebtedness to be a vice, even as law and social practice tended to favor debtors over their creditors. Beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, English law made a decided shift towards favoring the creditor over the debtor. The interests of the former were protected by law, while charity to the latter became a matter of individual discretion and complicated by debt's associations with prodigality. Concurrent with this shift was a

proliferation of defenses of debt and depictions of sympathetic debtors. The classic vice of debt was a virtue after all – the standard defense went – a bond between men and nations, alliance made material, a great net that bound all in mutual regard and cooperation. Such apologies rely on debt's immaterial connotations as a moral and affective bond between God and man, monarch and subject, master and servant, parents and children, the noble and the needy, among friends and across the Christian community. And yet, the high rates of debt litigation and imprisonment for especially petty debts beginning in the late sixteenth century suggest a considerable gap between such conceptions of debt and the law and practice of the land. We might read these arguments and representations idealizing debt relations as nostalgic reactions to the turn in debt law away from charity and reciprocity towards the often punitive enforcement of contracts. And yet, their relationship to the changing socio-economic and moral landscape appears to be more complicated than this. As we will see in the texts examined here, these arguments tend to be deployed as part of skillful rhetorical performances with recognizably self-interested and sometimes economically profitable ends that align with the ethos of an emerging market culture even as they seem to resist it. As with Falstaff's performance, it is difficult to disentangle moral sincerity from economic opportunism, difficult to say whether the debtors included in this study are nostalgic or innovative in their conceptions of the relationship between debts of love and debts of money. What I find is that they are both at once. These authors and their texts insist on and depend upon the continuities between affective ties and economic debts, even as they manipulate the rhetorical overlap between the two in order to abuse one in favor of the other. By playing with the tensions and affinities between debt's economic and affective values, these authors develop textual and rhetorical solutions, new generic conventions, and sophisticated engagements with moral problems. Far from proving irreconcilable, affection and economics –

as construed through early modern language and practice around debt and credit – adhere to one another with a cultural consciousness that relies on their critical interplay to confront the anxieties of a changing social landscape.

The Problem of Debt in Early Modern England

We might begin by asking why so many early modern authors were thinking about debt in the first place. As Charles Stanley Ross has observed, in early modern England, debt was as pervasive as sex.² During the latter half of the sixteenth century, England experienced intense population and economic expansion and a general rise in levels of market participation by all social sorts.³ The rise of capitalistic industries led to what L.C. Knights describes as a “dependence on money power” and thus those financial instruments of borrowing and lending entailed therein: usury and credit (70).⁴ The increasing importance of international trade led to the gradual liberalization of medieval usury laws in England and on the continent.⁵ Both the crown and large-scale commercial ventures vital to the wealth of the nation depended heavily on the ability to incur large amounts of debt.⁶ Debt was equally important on the local and interpersonal level, and here informal extensions of credit were used as well as formalized contracts, such as the debt bonds that carried the penalty of interest. Debt enabled King James to

² See Ross, *Elizabethan Literature and the Law of Fraudulent Conveyances* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2003), 1.

³ For thorough discussions of the large scale economic shifts in the period see C.G.A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500-1700, Volumes I and II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 129-156; Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), 3-4, 20, 24-72.

⁴ For discussions of early modern credit and usury, see Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation* (New York: St. Martins, 1998) and David Hawkes, *The Culture of Usury* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁵ See especially Charles R. Greisst, *Beggar Thy Neighbor* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 58-96.

⁶ Greisst, *Beggar Thy Neighbor*, 91-93.

maintain his extravagant court, the East India Company to explore new worlds, and the average early modern individual to consume anything from the daily bread necessary for survival to the popular luxuries of tobacco and a new suit of the most fashionable cut.⁷

The use of credit had been common among merchants and, locally, between individuals in medieval England.⁸ But what was common became necessary and ubiquitous by the sixteenth century, particularly in response to the period's well documented coinage crisis. What was new was the complexity and interdependence of credit networks, and hence, their precariousness, as well as a legal climate that increasingly favored the interests of the creditor over charity to the debtor. Most individuals and households were involved in these networks and most were simultaneously debtors and creditors.⁹ Defaults begot defaults, and the resulting insecurity led to heightened levels of debt litigation from 1580 to 1640, along the order of "hundreds of thousands of suits per annum."¹⁰ It would be an understatement to say that debt was a common experience; rather, it became a way of life, one that relied upon and, at the same time, rewrote traditional affective social relations.¹¹

⁷ For a summary of the crown's debt under King James, see Jenny Wormald's biographical essay on King James in DNB, section heading "Parliament, money, and ministers, 1610-1620." For a brief discussion of the crown's and the joint stock companies' use of debt capital, see Greisst, 91-93. For the average individual's debt expenditure, see Muldrew, *Economy*, 17-18, 104-107.

⁸ Muldrew, "Interpreting the Market: the ethics of credit and community relations in early modern England," *Social History* 18.2 (May 1993), 173.

⁹ See Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 3. See also Wrightson, *English Society*, 61.

¹⁰ See also Wrightson 173, n. 52. Muldrew, "Credit and the courts: debt litigation in a seventeenth-century urban community," *Economic History Review*, XLVI (Feb 1993).

¹¹ See Muldrew, "Credit and the courts: debt litigation in a seventeenth-century urban community," *Economic History Review*, XLVI (Feb 1993). In this article Muldrew uses court records from King's Lynn to show that individuals and households from all classes were involved in debt litigation. The poor, he points out, did not hesitate to sue their wealthy neighbors to recover unpaid debts. For Muldrew, "both credit, and the use of litigation over credit were not something exceptional, but a common feature of life for most members of the community" (30).

In contrast to a long history of usury and interest being considered appropriate only for transactions between “strangers,”¹² Craig Muldrew has shown that because early modern credit was an emotional currency – essentially trust – networks of credit often consisted of pre-existing affective relationships between kin, friends, neighbors, masters and servants.¹³ For this reason, it is not surprising that the language of economic debt overlaps with that of emotive and moral debts. Loans or extensions of credit would often have been pursued with reference to the emotional and moral ties between the would-be debtor and lender. Reciprocity was the moral structure underwriting traditional social relations, including those spanning the social hierarchy.¹⁴ This structure enabled would-be debtors to remind a potential creditor of what he or she owed them: love. Love in its various forms – friendship, charity, patronage, service, obedience – was then easily translated into economic currency. These affective relations, already framed in terms of what was owed between them, became debt relations twice over.

Problematically, economic debt often pulled apart from its affective foundation, threatening

¹² The standard biblical source for this tradition is Deuteronomy 23:19-20. In the Geneva Bible, this reads: “Thou shalt not give to usurie to thy brother: as usurie of money, usurie of meat, usurie of anie thing that is put to usurie. / Unto a stranger thou amiest lend upon usurie, but thou shalt not lend upon usurie unto thy brother, that the Lord thy God may blesse thee in all that thou settest thin hand to, in the land whether thou goest to possesse it.” For discussions on this tradition and how it shaped attitudes and laws regarding moneylending in the early modern period, see Greisst, *Beggar Thy Neighbor*, 13-57 and Hawkes, *Culture of Usury*, 60-93.

¹³ See especially Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 123-147. The overlap between economic relations and traditional social relations and their gradual differentiation in this period has been discussed elsewhere. See especially Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England*, which examines the arguments that enabled this differentiation which Appleby finds in place by the latter half of the seventeenth century. Wrightson also observes the economic uses of affective relations among kin, neighbors, and friends (*English Society*, 56-61).

¹⁴ For a general discussion of the importance of reciprocity for traditional social relations, see Wrightson, *English Society*, 47-73, especially 65-69. Muldrew insists that credit and debt litigation helped enforce reciprocity among the classes: “Thus in social and economic terms, credit was a leveling force within the community. Rich and poor alike were bound by reciprocal bonds of indebtedness and needed to trust one another. True, the poor were more indebted to the wealthy and credit did not ultimately alter the power of wealth, but the wealthy were still indebted to the poor to a considerable degree” (“Credit and the Courts,” 36). Muldrew’s focus, however, is on equality across creditors, regardless of class. The texts included in this study are more concerned with inequities between creditors and debtors. They are often interested in reminding creditors what they owe to their debtors (perhaps because the law was primarily concerned with the reverse), a focus which seems more in keeping with the period’s sense of reciprocal bonds than Muldrew’s claim that the courts treated all debtors alike.

traditional social bonds,¹⁵ particularly when defaults led to a creditor's ruin or to vengeful penalties and litigation against an insolvent debtor. That money owed between two people might be discussed in terms similar, even identical, to the love owed between them led to all manner of problems, anxieties, and opportunities the texts in this study examine by experimenting with these overlapping vocabularies of debt. As a result, the early modern discourse of debt is characterized by the central paradox of just who is obliged to whom in these relationships bound by both debts of love and of money.

As we will see below, early moderns inherited classical and biblical moral discourses that made figurative use of economic language, particularly debt. In addition to these discourses, historians and critics have emphasized the importance of the imported Italian innovation of double-entry accounting for the period's imaginative vocabulary and poetics.¹⁶ Pacioli's double-entry accounting, developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth century by Venetian merchants, became common practice in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. The method kept accounts in two columns, debit and credit, a structure which writers in the period found particularly useful for writing about debts and obligations of all sorts, particularly love and revenge. The application of the impersonal mathematics of bookkeeping to debt relations founded on complex affective ties pointed up the dangers and ethical conundrums involved in the quantification of love, and more generally human life. As Linda Woodbridge observes, "[t]he crucial enabling move of sixteenth-century mathematics, the conversion of unlikes to a single

¹⁵ Wrightson notes that the fundamental tension between "an individualistic agrarian capitalism and the ethics of traditional social obligations . . . often surfaced in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth century" (*English Society*, 68). This tension provides the backdrop for this study.

¹⁶ For a brief history of the origins of double-entry accounting, see Geisst, *Beggar Thy Neighbor*, 63-66. Woodbridge discusses the impact of double-entry bookkeeping on the literature of the period in the introduction to her collection of economic criticism, *Money and the Age of Shakespeare*, 1-18.

scale, finds an often sinister expression in Renaissance literature.”¹⁷ Indeed, Joyce Appleby attributes the growing depersonalization of economic relations in the seventeenth century in part to a cultural foregrounding of “the faceless relations of algebra.”¹⁸

It has been well established that early modern authors were highly conscious of the economic basis of the literary market and the theater, and that their literary productions were not only shaped by considerations of market demand,¹⁹ but that they also used economic plots, forms, and discourses through which to examine the material conditions of their cultural productions.²⁰ The early modern theater in particular depended on credit and debt relations in its operations, a fact which playwrights indebted to theater owners, such as the notorious theater owner and creditor Philip Henslowe, were highly aware.²¹ The promise of a play was a means for often insolvent playwrights to get extensions of credit. The writing of many early modern plays that we might prefer to think of as the pleasurable expression of this or that solitary genius’s creativity, was in fact the labor of this or that exploited debtor. The written play itself was a payment towards this debt, probably rarely paid off in full, unless one managed, like Shakespeare, to get ahead enough to buy a share in the theater, in which case, the playwright

¹⁷ Woodbridge, *Money and the Age of Shakespeare*, 11.

¹⁸ Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology*, 52.

¹⁹ See especially David Baker, *On Demand: Writing for the Market in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Most scholars interested in the economic content of early modern English drama begin from the Marxist point of departure that the text is shaped by its mode of production, and the theater of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England was an enterprise funded by debt. See especially Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in The Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²¹ See especially Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

might then turn moneylender himself.²² Most studies concerned with the material conditions of the early modern theater are quick to observe that many of the playwrights we study spent time, sometimes quite a lot of time, in debtors' prison. Thomas Dekker spent at least seven years in the King's Bench prison for a debt of £40 between 1613 and 1620.²³ Both Thomas Middleton and Philip Massinger, playwrights whose debt plays are examined here, are known to have spent time in debtors' prisons, as well as Ben Jonson, George Chapman, John Marston, John Lyly, Cyril Tourneur.²⁴

As Jean-Christophe Agnew has suggested, the market and the theater have a long history of being brought and thought together as cultural institutions that, while distinct and different in certain ways, share "peculiar experiential properties that set them apart from other kinds of exchange."²⁵ Agnew suggests the intimate link between the two can be understood through their shared dependence on credit and credibility:

Owing to the special and often implicit conditions of belief and accountability that operate within their bounds, the two institutions have for long periods of time stood at some remove from the rules and rituals of ordinary social intercourse. . . . [T]hough the rules governing credit in the market stalls of those times may have differed in detail from the conventions governing credibility in the adjoining theatrical booth, the fact nonetheless remains that in either instance the customer's will to believe was a stipulated or conditional act, a matter less of faith than of suspended disbelief.²⁶

²² Records indicate that Shakespeare sued at least two neighbors in Stratford for unpaid debts and hoarded grain to sell at a profit, a practice that was considered a kind of usury. See Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 2004), 362-364, and Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Richard Marggraf Turley, and Howard Thomas, "The Autumn King: Remembering Land in *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63.4 (Winter 2012), 537.

²³ See John Twyning, "Thomas Dekker, (c. 1572-1632)," *DNB*.

²⁴ See Amanda Bailey, *Of Bondage: debt, property, and personhood in early modern England*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 28.

²⁵ Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), x.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, x.

In the texts examined by this study, we will see authors bringing market credit relations to bear on the credit issues raised by their own texts and authorship, by interrogating the very debt relations that underwrite their texts and by using these timely economic themes to construct models of credible authorship. This collection of texts demonstrates the cultural tendency Agnew describes of thinking the market and theater (or the broader literary market) together and examines how the paradoxical discourse of debt described herein enabled this way of thinking.

So the answer to the most basic question raised by Falstaff's rhetorical trick – why debt? – becomes evident: debt was a social problem that was experienced in some way by nearly all early modern individuals regardless of their place along the social scale. Debt was ubiquitous and anxious and precarious. Debt was an economic and affective form that was fundamental to the early modern theater, authorship, and the relationships that constituted the literary market and culture. And, importantly, debt provided a discourse – marked by ambiguity and paradox – useful for articulating the broader tensions early moderns experienced between the moral obligations entailed in traditional social relations and emerging economic practices. Joyce Appleby's study of the early modern reconceptualization of economic life suggests that this tension was at its height in the first half of the seventeenth century. She writes, "After mid-century, economic writers continued to present their arguments in terms of right and wrong, but the affirmation of a moral order where economic activities were means to social ends – God's and man's – fell from public view."²⁷ The scope of my study, 1570-1630, covers a period preceding this alleged conceptual shift, a time when the relationship between economic life and the affective relations and moral obligations of the traditional social order were being actively queried, problematized, and hypothesized in the literature. Debt, this study contends, provided a discourse exceptionally suited to that cultural process.

²⁷ Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology*, 70.

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This inquiry began by questioning the degree to which the rhetorical slippery slope I have described above reflects a conceptual or practical interaction between debts of love and debts of money. The question led me to Craig Muldrew's extensive study on the early modern culture of credit, *The Economy of Obligation*. Of the interplay between emotion and economic language and structures, Muldrew writes, "In early modern discourse about the market, economic trust was interpreted in terms as emotive as other forms of human interaction such as neighbourliness, friendship and marriage, while, conversely, interest and contract, which now might be thought of as purely pragmatic economic relations, were concepts applied to a much broader spectrum of social interaction."<sup>28</sup> Muldrew's study reminds us that the "economic" did not exist as a discrete and impersonal category for early modern minds, or texts, and that relationships of borrowing and lending proceeded from relationships ideally defined by amity, charity, and trust. In terms of this model, Falstaff's conversion of friendship into a line of credit appears less a rhetorical trick than a description of how early modern credit relations tended to proceed. Debt relations were typically built atop existing affective relations. Credit was extended – often between kin, friends, and neighbors – as a sign of trust based on a personal knowledge of a potential debtor's moral character as much as and perhaps more than, his or her solvency. In this sense, the relationship between debts of love and those of money appears to be one based on actual practice.

The relationship between friendship and credibility represented in *Henry IV*, Parts 1 and 2, however, is a vexed one that complicates Muldrew's description of communal cooperation among amicable creditors and debtors. Despite Hal's intimacy with and affection for Falstaff, there is little trust between them. The Prince does not owe Falstaff a thousand pounds, and the old debtor's friendship with the Prince will not ultimately enable him to pay his many creditors

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<sup>28</sup> Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 125.

and bar tabs. And Hal does need to be reminded that he owes Falstaff his love. Concerns with credibility in the play take precedent over friendship and alliances, which function only as tools for managing this precious commodity. Falstaff and his “minions of the moon” are friends only so long as Hal has a political use for the bad credit his association with them lends. When the time is right, Hal wrests a line of good credit not from friends, or even from his father (who suffers from his own credit problems), but from his enemy, Hotspur. He further bolsters this credit by publically reneging on the debt of love he owes his friend and father-figure Falstaff. In a similar vein, the very allies that helped King Henry to his crown (the play’s ultimate sign and source of credit) are rendered enemies by the debt that stands between them. In the *Henriad*, then, affective relations do not serve as the basis for cooperative and amicable credit relations; rather, all relations are defined by the market for credibility, and affection becomes a language for manipulating one’s place in this market. Hal’s England is one in which market relations have so permeated social relations as to bankrupt the personal, affective ties to which its many debtors pay lip service. In this milieu, Falstaff’s take on debt – that it is ultimately all reducible to love – becomes more than a self-interested feint; it is a radical and righteous rebuff to the contrary model implied by Hal’s political strategy – that love and loyalty can be consumed and cast aside as needed. When Falstaff dies – perhaps of the wants brought on by his dried up credit, perhaps of a broken heart – his ability to exploit this language has not been lost, but his will to do so has.

Falstaff’s death signals a break in some kind of authentic continuity between affective and monetary debt relations. For all his self-interested rhetorical manipulations, it seems Falstaff did understand his monetary debts and his affective debts to follow a similar sort of logic, however problematic. For this delinquent debtor, they were all standing debts never intended to be paid quite in full, but always there to bind one person to another in ties that were at once

exploitable and true. Though Falstaff did his best to avoid paying back, an act he considers “a double labour” (*1Henry IV* 3.3.165), he keeps written bills of his debts on his person and responds with a surprising degree of agitation and concern when Hal steals these from his pocket while he sleeps in the tavern (*1Henry IV* 3.3). Falstaff’s antipathy for the battlefield, evidence of his cowardice, is also attributable to its insistence on immediate payment. Falstaff can “scape shot-free at London” but “here’s no scoring but upon the pate” (*1Henry IV* 5.3.30-31). Falstaff has little interest in the honor amongst enemies who pay one another in full by violently severing ties and storing up “proud titles” (*1Henry IV* 5.4.78). Falstaff’s long contentious relationship with Mistress Quickly, perhaps chief among his many perpetually unpaid creditors, begins with Falstaff reminding the Prince that he must recognize his connection to the Hostess for the very reason that he has “called her to a reckoning many a time and oft” (*1Henry IV* 1.2.44-5). It ends with the Hostess nursing him on his deathbed and providing the final accounting of his credibility: “Nay, sure he’s not in hell. He’s in Arthur’s bosom, if ever man went to Arthur’s bosom” (*Henry V* 9-10).<sup>29</sup> Falstaff’s death clears his tab of all his unpaid debts, and it seems this was always the payment that the old knight understood as the proper recompense for his many debts. Before the battle at Shrewsbury, Prince Harry attempts to bolster Falstaff’s courage by reminding him “thou owest God a death” (*1Henry IV* 5.1.126). Falstaff insists, however, “‘Tis not due yet. I would be loath to pay him before his day” (5.1.127-128). Far from being another dodge, Falstaff appears to have a very clear sense of when this death, the sum of all his debts, comes due. Immediately following Hal’s (now King Harry) “I know thee not, old man” (*2 Henry*

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<sup>29</sup> *The Life of Henry the Fifth, The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, Edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al. New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1997, 1445-1524.

IV 5.5.45),<sup>30</sup> Falstaff's unexpected response is to acknowledge, for the first time, an economic debt he owes: "Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pound" (5.5.70). Falstaff is promptly hauled off to the Fleet, an infamous debtors' prison, and the next we hear of him in *Henry V*, he is dying because "the King has killed his heart" (2.1.79). I would suggest then that for Falstaff, debts of all sorts are the standing relations between people, and they are only to be paid when affection is no more. Payment is the end of all ties, and for Falstaff payment means death.

Shakespeare's *Henriad* offers an alternative model of the relationship between debts of love and money to that described by Muldrew. Here, rather than credit relations proceeding amicably from preexisting networks of love and trust, love and trust are terms through which crises of debt and credit can be managed. The failure of Falstaff's authentic continuity between affective and monetary debt relations calls attention to the cultural conditions that render this rhetorical move so effective. The notion that debts of love and money might be somehow interchangeable, that they might adhere to a similar ethos or moral structure, was supportable in the early modern imagination. This notion was always available to provide a position from which to critique, resist, or creatively navigate the prevailing model of debt relations in which affection and economics were either alienated, or destructively intertwined. Even when employed for solely self-interested purposes, credibly shifting between debt's economic and affective values required some degree of cultural acceptance that there was a conceptual or practical basis for this move. Muldrew's model of affective economic relations can help explain this. *Ideally*, credit was an extension of the trust that proceeded from relationships of affection and knowledge of character. Certainly in smaller communities something like this model prevailed, but in the rapidly

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<sup>30</sup> *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth*, The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition, Edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al. New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1997, 1293-1380.

expanding metropolis of London, such a basis for credit was increasingly impossible.<sup>31</sup> In the city, the “currency of reputation,” Muldrew’s term for the circulation of communal judgment about an individual’s creditworthiness,<sup>32</sup> was more likely to be less about an intimate knowledge of one’s character and more about one’s associations – attachment to a household, a name, a patron or employer – or even the appearance one cut. Nonetheless, the basis for credit remained social, the value being extended – trust – was inherently emotive, and the language in which these transactions were conducted was one of amity and sociability.<sup>33</sup> The ideal forms were followed. Thus credit relations could be, and often were, managed through the language of affection and affective obligations, even where the only tie between a creditor and debtor might be a debt bond.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, as we will see in the chapter on *The Merchant of Venice*, the cultural ideal of debt relations being founded on affective ties, and being motivated by an amicable and reciprocal relationship between creditor and debtor, was written into English law surrounding debt bonds and the penalty of interest. The texts examined here use the paradoxical discourse of debt to bear on crises of credit in which the relationship between affective obligations and economic bonds require adjustment.

### ***Debt’s Discursive History***

A look at the OED’s entry on *debt* reveals the word to be a locus for convergences of the economic and the moral. The word is defined as “that which is owed or due; anything (as money,

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<sup>31</sup> See L.C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937, 1957), 141-42.

<sup>32</sup> See Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 123-147.

<sup>34</sup> The standard narrative is that economic relations became increasingly impersonal. See for instance Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology*, 20. Given the expansion of the market and the ever increasing complexity of social relations, this is certainly true relative to the local economies that prevailed previously. However, Muldrew’s study, and for that matter, most early modern texts representing economic relations in some way, suggest that, even where intimacy or social knowledge between two economic agents was lacking, transactions were still conducted with some nod towards affective ties.

goods, or service) which one is under obligation to pay or render to another: a. a sum of money or a material thing, b. a thing immaterial, c. that which one is bound or ought to do; (one's) duty," and further, "the condition of being under such an obligation." The entry includes instances of material and immaterial connotations current in the early modern period. Of economic significance, the phrases '*action of debt*,' '*bill of debt*,' and '*small debt*' are included. Many of debt's moral and affective connotations are listed as *figurative*, for instance, the word's common usage "in Biblical language as the type of an offence requiring expiation, a sin." This is a metaphor used throughout the New Testament, with the most exemplary instance coming from Matthew's Paternoster: "And forgive us our dettes, as we also forgive our detters." (Geneva, Matthew 6:12). Meanwhile, "*debt of (or to) nature*," defined as "the necessity of dying, death," and "*to pay the debt of (or one's debt to) nature*: to die," demonstrates a popular connotation of the word that we have seen to be central to Falstaff's debt management.

One of the earlier textual sources the OED provides for an example of *debt* as "a thing immaterial" comes from Chaucer: "**c.1386 CHAUCER** *Wife's Prol.* 130 Why sholde men elles in hir bookes sette/ That man shal yelde to his wyf hire dette." It is the conjugal debt Allison refers to here, and of particular interest is the centrality of the flesh to this immaterial debt: "Now wherewith sholde he make his paiement,/ If he ne used his sely instrument?" (131-32). Allison's description of the conjugal debt provides an example of the kind of rhetorical move with which this study is concerned. She moves from the Biblical concept of the conjugal debt, as that which husband and wife owe one another, to debt bondage, distorting the model of reciprocity in marital relations into a one-sided power dynamic in which a debtor is slave to his creditor:

Myn housbonde shal it have bothe eve and morwe,  
Whan that hym list come forth and paye his dette.  
An housbonde I wol have—I wol nate lette—  
Which shall be bothe my dettour and my thrall,



And have his tribulacion withal  
Upon his flesshe, whil that I am his wyf.  
I have the power duryng al my lyf  
Upon his proper body, and noght he.  
Right thus the Apostel tolde it unto me. (152-60)

For authority, Allison cites St. Paul, who provides the origin of the conjugal debt in I Corinthians 7:3-4: “Uxori vir debitum reddat, similiter autem et uxor viro. Mulier sui corporis potestatem non habet, sed viri; similiter autem et vir sui corporis potestatem non habet, sed mulier.” From the Vulgate: “The husband should render the debt to the wife, and moreover, the wife likewise to the husband. The wife has not authority of her body, but the husband; and moreover, the man has not authority of his body, but the wife.” The contrast between Paul’s model of conjugal debt and Allison’s provides a prime example of what manipulating debt’s various connotations can achieve. Here, *debt* as love and *debt* as money are treated as interchangeable in order to shift from one model of debt relations – one of reciprocity or mutual obligation – to quite another – one of thralldom in which a creditor has all the power. In many of the works I will discuss in this study, the goal is typically the reverse of what we see here with the Wife of Bath since the interlocutors tend to be debtors who are interested in reminding creditors that they have obligations to their debtors as well.

It is important to note that Allison’s rhetorical shift from conjugal debt to debt bondage is supported by the underlying centrality of flesh to both models of debt. To both, and to the debt of nature (death), the body is the currency of payment. Husband and wife pay their conjugal debts by giving the (sexual) authority of their bodies to one another. Humans pay their debt to nature through the death of the body. The bodies (and labor) of bondslaves belong to their creditors. This connection between debt and the body was important to the early modern discourse of debt described by this study as well because, as we will see, England’s debt law made the debtor’s

body collateral for the money or goods borrowed through a debt bond. As Amanda Bailey's recent study has shown, the early modern debtor's body was central to the problems inherent in discourses of debt, particularly those co-opted for developing political and philosophical theories of liberty.<sup>35</sup>

I have suggested that early modern authors experimented in their texts with the implications of debt's paradoxical discourse because (1) the social problem of debt was at a crisis point and (2) there were cultural conditions that made a connection between debts of love and debts of money a reasonable proposition. So far, we have seen how both Muldrew's description of early modern England's culture of credit and the word's own varied connotations support the interlinked nature of these different models of debt. The examples of the Biblical use of *debt* as "sin" and St. Paul's description of the conjugal debt, point us as well to the way moral vocabularies prevalent in the period depend on the language of debt. Trying to sort out the relationship of influence between economic debt and debt as a moral concept can begin to feel a little like the riddle of the chicken and the egg. Which conception of debt is primary? Do early discourses of morality and justice borrow the logic and language of ancient economics, or do economic forms and relations proceed from early notions of cosmic justice and social obligation?

Recent work by anthropologist David Graeber suggests just how fundamental and ancient the relationship between these models of debt are. Graeber's expansive history of debt, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, characterizes this history as one marked by profound moral confusion.<sup>36</sup> For Graeber, the answer to the chicken and egg riddle is credit. Credit as currency is the starting point of a history in which "our sense of morality and justice is reduced to the language of a

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<sup>35</sup> See Bailey, *Of Bondage*.

<sup>36</sup> Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2010).

business deal” and “moral obligations to debts.”<sup>37</sup> Graeber posits that our moral language emerged from a long history of “the struggle between rich and poor” which “has largely taken the form of conflicts between creditors and debtors.”<sup>38</sup> He points to terms such as “reckoning” and “redemption” which he claims are taken “directly from the language of ancient finance,” asserting that “[a]rguments about who really owes what to whom have played a central role in shaping our basic vocabulary of right and wrong.”<sup>39</sup> For Graeber, however, this economic lexicon is inadequate to the moral concepts to which it was applied. He suggests,

It’s as if the great prophets and religious teachers had no choice but to start with that kind of language because it’s the language that existed at the time, but they only adopted it so as to turn it into its opposite: as a way of saying debts are not sacred, but forgiveness of debt, or the ability to wipe out debt, or to realize that debts aren’t real – these are the acts that are truly sacred.<sup>40</sup>

Graeber’s history of debt makes its own moral (and political) argument, pointing to modern day forms of debt bondage (such as what the International Monetary Fund and World Bank do with loans to third-world countries) and the virtues of the old concept of Jubilee, in which records of debt were periodically wiped cleaned. In this respect, Graeber’s argument is a modern day example of the same sort made by early modern pamphleteers and authors of petitions, only with hundreds of pages of prefatory scholarship designed to remind us that economics and moral obligations have a long, interwoven history that informs our cultural assumption that economic debts *must* be paid.

This history is one that bears some intrinsic fascination for us in light of our own most recent economic crisis fueled by debt being treated as a commodity, as well as the modern

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Graeber, “What is Debt? – An Interview with Economic Anthropologist David Graeber,” *Naked Capitalism* (26 August 2011), par. 19.

tendency to pretend that economics is an impersonal and amoral category. Margaret Atwood examined this same history, in far less detail, with *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*.<sup>41</sup> Atwood's answer to the chicken and egg riddle differs from Graeber's. Rather than credit being the primary form in the interrelationship between economic and moral language, Atwood describes the primary conceptual form as a universal sense of fairness, "without which," she insists, "debt and credit structures could not exist."<sup>42</sup> Fairness, the principle of reciprocity, or balancing out by weighing one thing against another, underlie systems of borrowing and lending as well as systems of law and order.<sup>43</sup> Atwood traces figures of justice and cosmic balance from the ancient world, through the major religions, to modern culture, all of which contain manifestations of this fundamental principle: "As we sow, so shall we reap . . . and not only that, but someone or something is in charge of evening up the scores."<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, many of these figures posit the heart or soul as the site of tabulation. Atwood observes:

In the afterlife of Ancient Egypt, the heart was weighed against the concepts of justice and truth, which included the right order of the cosmos and the natural world; in the Christian system, Michael the Archangel weighs the soul against its deeds; and, going back to the bank book I had as a child, the red debits were weighed against the black credits, and the resulting figure was called 'the balance.' The Ancient Egyptian balance weighed moral pluses and minuses, as did the archangel's; however, the bank balance was concerned only with numbers, though it was considered a bad thing to go too far into the red: bad for you, and bad of you, as well.<sup>45</sup>

Atwood shifts here from spiritual tabulation to double entry accounting pretty seamlessly with the suggestion that these latter quantitative calculations still contain the moral weight of the Archangel's scales. One explanation for this might be found in the gradual movement from

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<sup>41</sup> Atwood, *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (Toronto: Anansi, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Atwood, *Payback*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

forms of justice that relied on blood for blood retribution to the legal recognition of substitute currencies for injury, such as financial compensation.<sup>46</sup> A sin or act of guilt produced an imbalance – a debt – that could under some systems of law be righted – or paid – with money. Perhaps it follows then that imbalances in the account book, economic debts, could carry the weight of sin and guilt.

### *Debt in Classical Literature*

I would suggest that these interrelationships between moral debts (which I equate with debts of love in this project) and debts of money were more familiar to early moderns than they are for us, in large part because “Economics” did not yet exist as a distinct scientific field unto itself, but also because of the wider influence of classical and biblical discourses in the early modern period. The confluence of moral and affective debt with economic debt can be found in various classical works. Across the following examples, we can see the continuities between economic and affective obligations both assumed and questioned.

An early example can be found in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, an 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE narrative poem that takes as its poetic purpose the advising of a ne’er do well brother, Perses, in matters of good household management. Hesiod instructs Perses on the proper use of borrowing and lending among neighbors:

Borrow fair measure from neighbors, and pay them back in proportion/ With an identical measure, and more, just as much as you’re able./ Thus if you’re ever in need, you’ll have somebody you can depend on... Do not procure base gain, for a gain that is base is a dead loss./ One who befriends you, befriend, and someone who visits you, visit;/ Everyone gives to the open-handed but none to the stingy./ Giving’s a good wife; grasping’s a bad wife, death is her dowry;/ Therefore, the man who gives willingly gives magnificently and/ Comes to rejoice in his own gift, taking delight in his bounty,/ Whereas the man

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 38.

who, prompted by shamelessness, seizes another's/ Goods, be they ever so small, his heart will be thoroughly frozen.<sup>47</sup>

Here borrowing and lending are a communal tie and a moral code defined by that principle of reciprocity Atwood pinpoints as primary to structures of debt. As with the Ancient Egyptians, violations of this code have their impact here on the "heart." Significantly Hesiod connects borrowing and lending to the circulation of gifts, a form of exchange more clearly steeped in spiritual and affective relations in our modern thought than economic exchanges. And yet, as Marcel Mauss's gift economy paradigm suggests, self-interest is not absent from this spiritual and affective ethos. Even as Hesiod describes these principles of borrowing and lending in moral terms, he indicates that the reward of such good behavior is more than moral satisfaction. "Giving" rather than "grasping" is also the most lucrative fiscal policy. The behavior Hesiod describes is then at once moral, affective, and economic; goods as well as friendship and sociability circulate as a result. Virtuous behavior, defined by its effect on the community, correlates directly to gain or loss. More is gained in being "open-handed" than "stingy." "Giving" is "good" and "grasping" not only "bad" but "death." Here the confluence of moral and economic debt can be attributed to their shared ethos in agrarian communities like the one described by Hesiod, and perhaps like those that predominated in medieval England before the large-scale movements to the city of the sixteenth century.

Aristophanes' 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE comedy *Clouds*, on the other hand, examines debt as a city problem in a manner that looks familiar to Jacobean London's own city comedies. The plot is a simple one that draws on 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athens' own problems with debt. Strepsiades is a rural Athenian who finds himself overburdened with debts due to the habits of his playboy son,

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<sup>47</sup> Hesiod. *Hesiod's Works and Days*, translated by David Tandy and Walter Neale (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), lines 338-356.

Pheidippides. As the last day of the month approaches on which the interest on Strepsiades' many debts will fall due, the frustrated father grasps for solutions to avoid ruin. Ultimately Strepsiades' decides that the Sophists of the play, namely Socrates and Chaerephon, must teach his son "prevarication, incrimination, and misrepresentation" so that he can make "the Inferior Argument [which] can debate an unjust case and win."<sup>48</sup> Strepsiades is convinced that the rhetorical trickery of the Sophists will enable his son to talk his way out of debt. The plan works, and Strepsiades mimics his son's rhetorical tricks to rid himself of his creditors and their suits. These tricks depend upon wordplay similar to that of the early modern authors and characters of this study. For instance, when a creditor asks Strepsiades to at least pay the interest on his loan if he cannot afford to repay the full principle, Strepsiades responds by interpreting "interest" according to its affective and cooperate connotations: "What do you mean 'interest'? I'm not in the least bit interested in your problems."<sup>49</sup> The structure of the plot is based on the underlying connections between the economic debts Strepsiades owes his creditors, the affective debts he expects his son to pay him, and the revenge he determines to pay the Sophists in order to settle the score. Though Strepsiades manages to avoid paying his debts, the Chorus warns that he will come to regret overturning "Justice" in this way. The same logic and rhetorical prowess that enables his son to talk his way out of economic debts, enables him to, by the play's end, justify striking his father (and mother, if he so wished, Pheidippides warns). Strepsiades learns that paying one's debts, economic and affective, is all of a piece; they are all, for Aristophanes, the fulfillment of justice, and neglecting one threatens the fulfillment of the others. Ultimately then, the traditional link between economic and affective debts we saw above in Hesiod is

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<sup>48</sup> Aristophanes, *Clouds*, translated by Peter Meineck (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000), lines 874, 115.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 1285.

affirmed by the comedy, but we can also see how even this early, a city setting, a comedic emplotment, and an underlying historical context of pervasive problems with economic debt lead to literary experiments with the real versus rhetorical overlap between economic and affective models of debt.

The primary targets of Aristophanes' comedy are the Sophists, for whom Socrates is made the comedic representative (despite the historic Socrates' own criticisms of the school and their methods). Aristophanes uses Socrates to mock the presumably sophistical notion that Justice does not always consist of paying one's debts. Aristophanes' conservative comedy disagrees, suggesting that when the "Inferior Argument" can be made to beat the "Superior Argument" by asserting that Justice does not exist, then indeed one should not expect to find Justice anywhere. In this way, Aristophanes' comedy criticizes the kind of paradoxical rhetoric and argumentation that often accompanies treatments of debt throughout its literary history, particularly those that attempt to get around the payment of economic debts in some way. The rhetorical play that will prove such a vital skill in managing crises of debt and credit for early modern authors and characters is already in classical Athens the tool of the prodigal wit and subject to suspicion.

As we see with the example of Falstaff, the sympathetic debtors of this study give voice to, on the one hand, something like Hesiod's sense that debt's economic and affective obligations can and should be of a piece, consistent with and complementary to one another and beneficial to some notion of common weal. On the other hand, such arguments reveal themselves to be part of an often cynical effort to manipulate debt relations or the credit market in the speaker's favor towards an end that is self-interested if not explicitly economically profitable. In this sense, the sympathetic debtors of this study echo Aristophanes' view that debt's only virtue is its role as the



mother of rhetorical invention. And yet, Plato provides an alternative to Aristophanes' cynical view of arguments that can talk their way out of debt.

Book I of Plato's *Republic* (~380 BCE) includes a Socratic dialogue that may recount some of the ideas associated with Socrates which Aristophanes' earlier text (~423 BCE) takes to task. Socrates' interrogation of Justice through debt is set up in a dialogue with the rich citizen Cephalus. The philosopher asks the old man what he considers to be the greatest blessing of his wealth, and Cephalus responds by citing the peace of mind that comes with knowing he has paid his debts as he approaches death: "And the great blessing of riches, I do not say to every man, but to a good man, is, that he has had no occasion to deceive or to defraud others, either intentionally or unintentionally; and when he departs to the world below he is not in any apprehension about offerings due to the gods or debts which he owes to men."<sup>50</sup> His response refers to economic as well as affective and spiritual debts. What is most interesting here is the notion that wealth enables one to satisfy *all* of these debts. It not only provides payment for economic debts, but it prevents the cruel necessities and wants that might motivate transgressions which stand as obstacles to fulfilling the moral and affective debts we owe to gods and men. Here, possessing wealth takes away the impetus for violating our spiritual and moral obligations. In keeping with what we have seen in Hesiod and Aristophanes, then, there is an underlying assumption in Cephalus' thinking here that there is a clear connection and continuity between these different types of debt and the importance of satisfying them.

What Socrates pulls from Cephalus's response, and what he questions, is the underlying assumption that justice is defined by the payment of one's debts. Socrates does not agree that in all cases paying a debt is the just thing to do and offers what he considers a fitting exception to such a rule: "Suppose that a friend when in his right mind has deposited arms with me and he

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<sup>50</sup> Plato, *Republic* in *Five Great Dialogues*, translated by B. Jowett (Roslyn, NY: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1942), 226.

asks for them when he is not in his right mind, ought I to give them back to him? No one would say that I ought or that I should be right in doing so, any more than they would say that I ought always to speak the truth to one who is in his condition.”<sup>51</sup> Socrates’ line of inquiry leads Polemachus, with whom he is disputing at this point, to conclude that paying one’s debts as a measure for justice must refer to giving each his due in terms of good and evil or love and hatred rather than returning deposits (of gold, or arms for that matter) without regard to the recipient’s well-being. Polemachus originally asserts that what we owe our friends and our enemies differs, but Socrates ultimately leads him to see that justice, or goodness and virtue, is what we owe to everyone. In this dialogue, Socrates never determines what justice is so much as what it is not, but it is clear that for Socrates, moral and affective debts take precedent over economic ones; a conclusion that is not surprising considering his later protestations to Thrasymachus that he pays his gratitude in praise rather than money. Of the classical treatments of debt here, this dialogue stands out as an early interrogation of the fundamental assumption that debts must be paid, that this indeed is the very definition and model for justice, as assumption that thinkers are still grappling with by examining debt’s economic, moral, and affective forms, as indicated by David Graeber’s recent work. As Aristophanes’ comedy indicates, conventional thought held Socrates’s argument to be suspect and threatening to the social order. We will see how similar arguments hold up in the early modern period when the tensions between economic and affective debt appear as evident as the continuities.

### *Debt in the Bible*

The most important concept concerning debt in the Old Testament is the Hebrew practice of Jubilee described in Leviticus. “Also thou shalt number seven Sabbaths of yeres vnto thee,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 226.

*euen* seuen times seuen yere: and the space of the seuen Sabbaths of yeres wil be vnto thee nine and fourty yere./ Then thou shalt cause to blowe the trumpete of the Iubile in the tenth *day* of the seuenth moneth: euen in the day of the reconciliation shal ye make the trumpet blowe, through out all your land” (Geneva, Leviticus, 25:8-9).<sup>52</sup> In the fiftieth year, all debts were wiped clean, and slaves and prisoners were freed. These actions were intended to make God’s mercies manifest, but they were also part of a more comprehensive economic system in which property rights were always calculated in terms of the years remaining until the next Jubilee. What neighbors owed one another as debtors and creditors, tenants and landlords, servants, bondslaves and masters was in some respect, in this system, always considered in terms of both economic and spiritual relations. God was the common denominator in these relations, including the economic ones, since he was the first possessor of all land and property, including men.<sup>53</sup> It was the very notion that property ownership could only ever be secondary to God’s possession that perhaps made it possible for the dispossessed to regain possession (of land, or their bodies and labor) with the coming of the Jubilee. This biblical concept of debt forgiveness comes up often in early modern works that argue for debt relief, primarily the petitions of imprisoned debtors and sermons. For instance, a 1622 petition addressed to King James and Parliament sets up the Biblical example of Jubilee as the ideal response of Christian charity to their distress:

It is therefore in Christian charity wished and in all godly policy desired. That if it shal not seeme fit to grant a Iubile, wherein mens bodies may be set free from Imprisonment and bondage, according to the will of God in the old Law; Or that all Debts and Trespasses may be remitted according to the will of our Lord and Saviour in the new Law; That yet the bodies and endeavors of all Debtors may be free from Imprisonment, and the Creditors recovery be made against the Debtors lands and goods, according to the ancient fundamental Lawes of this Kingdome, which are not repealed: therefore ought to

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<sup>52</sup> *Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Henrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007).

<sup>53</sup> This notion important for Bailey’s study in particular. See Bailey, *Of Bondage*.

binde, and in this behalf are most consonant to the law of God, to Christian charity, to the rule of Iustice, and to godly policy, as is before shewne.<sup>54</sup>

For early moderns, references to the Jubilee enabled arguments for debt forgiveness and liberation. The notion of Jubilee not only provides Biblical authority for debt forgiveness but also nostalgically harkens a time –real or imagined – when affective and moral debts outweighed economic obligations. While the Old Testament Jubilee does offer a model for balancing these obligations, in its original historical context, it depended upon an economic system that was deeply interwoven into the spiritual structures of its culture. In early modern discourses of debt, Jubilee’s function is primarily metaphorical – a call to remember the spiritual obligation of forgiveness – though it also serves as a Biblical precedent for the legal enforcement of debt forgiveness, which debtors’ petitions are often seeking from King James and Parliament.

The New Testament’s use of the debtor as the representative of sinners and, thus, humankind in general is perhaps the most significant development in discourses surrounding debt. The Parable of the Two Debtors in Luke (7:40-50) and the Parable of the Debtor of Ten Thousand Talents in Matthew (18:21-35) both imagine the debtor as the figure whose condition is most akin to that of the Christian in need of forgiveness or grace. Though this association does little towards dissociating debt from vice, the translation of debt into man’s postlapsarian condition is potentially redemptive in its universal application. If all men are debtors, then the debtor becomes less a figure of profligacy and more one of humility. As we have seen, the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer from Matthew is the best known instance of this metaphor: “And forgive us our dettes, as we also forgive our detters” (*Geneva*, Matt. 6.9-13). Matthew’s Paternoster was used as the liturgical version of this most central Christian prayer, and the

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<sup>54</sup> *A Petition to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, the Lords Spirituall and Temporall, and Commons of the Parliament now assembled, Wherein is declared the mischiefes and inconveniences, arising to the King and Common-wealth, by the Imprisoning of mens bodies for Debt* (London, 1622), 39.

English rendering of the Greek (οφειλήματα and οφειλέταις) was “dettes” and “detters” in the Great Bible, the Bishops Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the King James (as opposed to Luke’s alternate version, which was generally rendered as “sinnes” and those who are “indebted” to us or “tresspasseth” against us). As we will see in chapter three, the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer was often invoked in petitions for debt forgiveness. However, the period also produced a number of expositions on the Lord’s Prayer in which ministers were careful to distinguish between economic debts and the kinds of moral wrongs or trespasses they insist the prayer has in mind. Uses of and responses to the Lord’s Prayer in the early modern period around the social problem of debt suggest that the degree to which the continuity between economic and spiritual debts was accepted depended on the purposes of the rhetorician.

An often cited verse that carefully parses debt’s civil and sacred values is Romans 13:8. The verse articulates St. Paul’s doctrine of love or the sacred debt of love. It reads, “Owe nothing to any man, but this, that ye love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the Lawe.” Following Paul’s commands to “pay ye tribute” and “render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor,” this verse distinguishes love as the only acceptable and lawful perpetual debt. More significantly, the verse figures love as an obligation somehow antithetical to payment. Where tribute pays the debt of tribute and honor that of honor, to love is not to pay the debt of love but to perpetuate the owing. Hence neighborly love and charity are figured in terms of a standing mutual debt, the payment of which would paradoxically absolve or sever the bond. The distinction drawn by St. Paul in this chapter seems to coincide with distinctions between civil law and divine law. Tribute, custom, fear and honor are civil debts which are to be paid; but the obligation to “love

thy neighbor as thyself” (13.9) is a divine law and as such cannot be paid by man, only perpetually owed.

As we saw with Falstaff, the positive value of the perpetual or standing debt in the realm of affective relations could be appropriated, rhetorically at least, for economically delinquent debtors. On the one hand, failing to distinguish between civil and affective debts could prove disastrous in this way. On the other, standing economic debts were, in practice, fairly common between early modern individuals and households with longstanding ties. As Muldrew has shown, a fair amount of interpersonal debt was longstanding and, rather than paid, simply crossed off down the line when the debtor involved had an opportunity to return a favor, reversing their roles.<sup>55</sup> So while legal debt bonds and other formalized civil debts perhaps needed to be distinguished from the logic of the sacred debt of love, the notion that the two might function in similar ways was not altogether as ridiculous as Falstaff’s rhetorical manipulations make them appear to a modern reader.

It is impossible to consider intersections between biblical and early modern discourses of debt without mentioning the prodigal son story of Luke. The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is the most influential narrative for early modern debt plots and debtor types. Though the Parable of the Prodigal Son resembles the other debtor parables (The Parable of the Two Debtors and the Parable of the Debtor of Ten Thousand Talents) in its economic content and its lessons of mercy and forgiveness, it is distinct in its explicit association of economic hardship with waste and riotous living. It is significant then that it is in the mold of the prodigal that many representations of debtors in early modern literature are cast. The early modern prodigal figure retains the debtor’s associations with profligate living and downplays the elements of humility, mercy, and forgiveness that are present in the biblical tradition. This is likely a reflection of early

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<sup>55</sup> Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 107-108.

modern concerns about the causes for delinquent debt. Muldrew observes that as defaults became a widespread problem, “[m]any began to worry that they might end up paying for the purchase of luxury goods or the good living of their socially ambitious neighbours.”<sup>56</sup> The complaint literature of the period often accuses debtors of defaulting on loans out of greed or malice rather than insolvency. In 1571, legislation was passed to limit the ability of debtors to fraudulently convey their property and wealth into the hands of associates in order to keep them safe from the reach of creditors’ suits.<sup>57</sup> Clearly the debtor as unrepentant prodigal was an association present and circulating in texts related to the problem of debt in the period.

In this study, we will primarily encounter prodigal-debtor types in city comedies. However, Richard Helgerson’s book *The Elizabethan Prodigals* is worth mentioning here because it both considers the earlier prodigal-debtor types of Elizabethan fiction, and importantly, introduces the prodigal as a paradigm for early professional authorship. Helgerson explains the popularity of the theme in part through its prominence in grammar school education where it was often content for Latin school plays and “urged on [the students] as an image of what their own lives would be if they disregarded the narrowly conservative precepts of their fathers and teachers.”<sup>58</sup> Helgerson further observes that the prodigal son story used as admonishment for school boys often “ended in punishment rather than forgiveness,”<sup>59</sup> perhaps encouraging a similar tendency he notes among much of the later Elizabethan prodigal son literature:

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>57</sup> See Ross, *Elizabethan Literature and the Law of Fraudulent Conveyance*, which examines legal and literary responses to this particular aspect of debt law between 1571 and 1601.

<sup>58</sup> Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 3.

Particularly conspicuous is the lack of any repeated attention to the merciful resolution: the joyful reception by the father of his erring son, the killing of the fatted calf, the bestowal of the best robe, and the placing of a ring on the prodigal's hand and shoes on his feet. All this, which gives substance to the main theme of the parable both in St Luke and in subsequent pictorial and literary representations, is absent from most Elizabethan prodigal son stories, even from those which end happily. Not the parable of the Prodigal Son, with its benign vision of paternal forgiveness, but rather the paradigm of prodigal rebellion interested the Elizabethans.<sup>60</sup>

For Helgerson, the interest this rebellion paradigm held for authors like Gascoigne, Lyly, Greene, Lodge, and Sidney can be understood through their anxious identities as writers of romance rebelling against the expectations of their humanistic educations. Linking the theme of unthriftiness with the uncertainty these authors felt concerning their endeavors as professional writers, Helgerson offers an interesting argument in which the prodigal son story becomes a psychological repository for the anxieties of the first generation of English authors. In chapter two of this study, we will see how England's first published female secular poet, Isabella Whitney, similarly makes use of the prodigal-debtor as a figure for her own insecure authorship.

The overwhelming focus of Judeo-Christian discourses of debt is on forgiveness. Christianity's major contribution is the typology of the debtor as everyman. But as we have seen, biblical discourses provide material to support a variety of arguments about economic debt and its relationship to spiritual and affective debts. The debt forgiveness modeled in the Bible can be, and often is, deployed literally by debtors and apologists in the period, while its function as a metaphor is emphasized by those interested in preserving the rule of contract and law, or simply getting repaid. Overall, by locating value in the figure of the debtor as a symbol of humanity and an object for mercy, biblical discourses of debt set the scene for the kinds of maneuvers early modern authors made around this theme.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



## *Debt in Theory*

A notable text in the discursive history of debt as a concept through which to understand social relations and ethics is Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The work asserts a polemical history of ethics which critiques Judeo-Christian values (specifically justice, equality, and compassion) as, for Nietzsche, the unfortunate result of the struggle between what he terms the aristocratic morality (ethic of active and ruthless self-affirmation) and the slave morality (reactive and resentful response of the weak to their domination by the self-affirming strong). Originally, Nietzsche has it, aristocratic morality prevailed in which the "good" was essentially the noble, the strong, the powerful (Rome), and the "bad" referred to the weakness of the lower classes, those upon whom the "good" could assert their will to power (Judea). With the rise of Judeo-Christian culture, the *ressentiment* of the weak overthrew the hegemony of the active will to power, and the weak became "good" while the strong became "bad."<sup>61</sup> This is Nietzsche's take on the paradoxical nature of Christianity I have gestured to above.

In this paradigmatic conflict, the central relational structure for Nietzsche is the creditor-debtor relationship. In Nietzsche's account, from this encounter of unequals is born the concept of guilt and its related juridical concepts: justice, recompense, punishment, etc. David Graeber's recent work on debt posits a similar genealogy. For Nietzsche, justice, religion, and the state all cohere around the central concept of indebtedness or guilt, the notion that we owe some unpayable something to our forefathers and to God as to our creditors. Furthermore, these debts are enforced by the threat of violence against our bodies, punishment that understands a certain degree of suffering on the debtor's part and pleasure on the creditor's as compensation for the

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<sup>61</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*, Translated by Douglas Smith, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

damage or imbalance caused by unpaid debts.<sup>62</sup> As Douglas Smith explains, from this perspective, “all civilization for Nietzsche is a product of economically sanctioned violence.”<sup>63</sup> For Nietzsche, Christianity’s big move in the history of these power relations was to turn the equation against the creditor in favor of the debtor:

... all at once we find ourselves standing in front of the horrific and paradoxical expedient in which tortured humanity has found a temporary relief, that stroke of genius on the part of *Christianity*: God sacrificing himself for the guilt of man, God paying himself off, God as the sole figure who can redeem on man’s behalf that which has become irredeemable for man himself – the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor, out of *love* (are we supposed to believe this? --), out of love for his debtor!<sup>64</sup>

For Nietzsche the rise of the sympathetic debtor and the creditor obliged, or the slave revolt in morals, is the beginning civilization’s decay. For him, or at least for the purposes of his polemic, “its egalitarian values promote weakness and mediocrity at the expense of vitality and dynamism.”<sup>65</sup> These conclusions are best understood in their Victorian context; however, if we run Nietzsche’s thesis against the early modern texts examined in this study, we would find that while many of the texts included here appeal to an ethos that favors the weakness of the debtor over the power of the credit, this is in many ways a cultural response to a historical moment when the law is making the opposite shift.

Most influential for scholars interested in early modern economics is Marcel Mauss’ *The Gift* which has contributed foundational work for understanding the overlapping relationships between the affective, moral, and economic aspects of human exchange. Mauss’ study is the

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<sup>62</sup> David Graeber’s argument is clearly influenced by Nietzsche’s, both in its conclusions and methodologies. Like Graeber’s recent work, Nietzsche’s relies heavily both on economic anthropology and philology.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, “Introduction,” *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Friedrich Nietzsche (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), xvii.

<sup>64</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 72.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, “Introduction,” xvi.

“first systematic and comparative study of the widespread custom of gift exchange and the first understanding of its function in the articulation of the social order.”<sup>66</sup> His examination of this total social phenomenon – “at the same time economic, juridical, moral, aesthetic, religious, mythological and socio-morphological”<sup>67</sup> within primitive cultures also functions implicitly as a means for understanding similar institutions at earlier phases of historical civilization (archaic cultures) as well as within our own present culture and time.<sup>68</sup> Its fundamental contribution is to identify the “obligatory and interested” nature of prestations (gifts, payments, services) that are “in theory voluntary, disinterested, and spontaneous.”<sup>69</sup> As Mauss observes early in his essay, “[t]he form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behavior is formal pretence and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest.”<sup>70</sup> What Mauss describes here are exchanges based on the implicit contract that gifts given must be returned in some way. As well as describing behavior we might recognize in our own lives on certain formal occasions, the kinds of exchanges Mauss describes often figure into early modern English dramas. His emphasis in particular on an underlying economic self-interest veiled with pretence and social deception (perhaps rhetoric of love and praise) makes his description of these important social forms especially relevant for the self-consciousness with which early modern texts explore the tensions underlying such exchanges.

Furthermore, Mauss observes that these exchanges extend beyond gifts we recognize as forms of

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<sup>66</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard, “Introduction,” *The Gift* by Marcel Mauss (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), ix.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>69</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, translated by Ian Cunnison (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, 1.

wealth and property to include “courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances and feasts.”<sup>71</sup> The circulation of both economic and affective gifts work together then to create and satisfy these interested obligations among groups of people (friends, allies, households, families, tribes, states, etc.). Mauss’ description of potlatch in particular, in which gift-giving takes on certain destructive and agonistic functions,<sup>72</sup> is useful in understanding the sometimes destructive nature of borrowing and lending, a theme explored by the tragedies of my final chapter: *Timon of Athens* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*.

We like our critiques of capitalism to come from Marx. In late 2008 and early 2009 the following passage, falsely attributed to Marx’s work *Das Kapital*, circulated Wall Street and various blogs: “Owners of capital will stimulate the working class to buy more and more of expensive goods, houses and technology, pushing them to take more and more expensive credits, until their debt becomes unbearable. The unpaid debt will lead to bankruptcy of banks, which will have to be nationalised, and the State will have to take the road which will eventually lead to communism.”<sup>73</sup> *Das Kapital* describes the credit system as a mechanism for the centralization of capital, and it discusses the role of national or public debt. Marx did not, however, explicitly incorporate personal debt into his critique, despite his own experience of living in perpetual debt.<sup>74</sup> Marxist historians and critics, such as Raymond Williams and L.C. Knights, were the first to systematically consider early modern economic culture and to read the period’s literature in light of this context. The development of New Social History and New Historicism, both of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 31-37.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Megan McArdle, “Faux Marx,” *The Atlantic* (14 January, 2009), par. 1.

<sup>74</sup> See Peter Stallybrass, “Marx’s Coat” in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*.

which proceeded from Marxist criticism, laid the foundations for New Economic Criticism, the methodological approach with which this study is most closely aligned.

## **The Critical Field**

New Economic Criticism emerged as a category of critical methodology in the early 1990's, but the works that it claims as its beginnings are from a decade earlier, in particular, Marc Shell's *The Economy of Literature* (1978) and Kurt Heinzelman's *The Economics of the Imagination* (1980). The mode of criticism was first described by Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen in a 1999 collection of critical essays titled *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics*. The editors describe the goals of this critical practice: "... the challenge is to rediscover the contact points among literature, culture, and economics, to determine whether these cross-disciplinary exchanges are valuable, and to use each discourse as a monitor or counterpractice that will expose the weakness, blind spots, and biases of the other."<sup>75</sup> While Woodmansee and Osteen note that the earliest economic criticism can be found in "the brand of Marxism practiced by Lukacs, the Frankfurt school, and Left critics of the 1930s,"<sup>76</sup> they trace the critical foundations of New Economic Criticism more directly to Foucault and cultural theory in its underlying concern for "how social forces and conditions both shape and are shaped by economic discourses and practices."<sup>77</sup> Woodmansee and Osteen observe that practitioners of New Economic Criticism adopt various approaches in examining these intersections, but perhaps the most fundamental approach, and certainly an influential one for this study, is the homological method. Marc Shell, Jean-Joseph Goux and

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<sup>75</sup> Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen, *The New Economic Criticism: studies at the intersection of literature and economics* (London & New York, 1999), 12.

<sup>76</sup> Woodmansee and Osteen, *New Economic Criticism*, 13.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 12.

Walter Benn Michaels are all founders of this method which operates based on the following premise:<sup>78</sup>

. . . that economics provides a ready-made system of tropes and fictions about value, debt, money, and exchange that underpins not only its own practices and texts, but also literary discourses that are less obviously economic. Economic criticism, in short, is predicated on the existence and disclosure of parallels and analogies between linguistic and economic systems.<sup>79</sup>

While this approach remains foundational to much economic criticism, it has been critiqued for its potential hazards. Frederick Jameson warns that it can lead to “the vaguest kind of general formulations and the most unenlightening assertions of ‘identity’ between entities of utterly distinct magnitude and properties” and furthermore, that such identities may be assumed rather than proven. Amy Koritz and Douglas Koritz warn against a danger they call “economism” in which the appropriation of economic terms may limit “what can be conceived by restricting discursive fields and offering univocally economic explanations for overdetermined cultural phenomena.”<sup>80</sup>

New Economic Criticism more contemporary with Woodmansee’s and Osteen’s definitive collection attempts to avoid these potential pitfalls through a New Historicist approach the editors describe as more concerned with representation, “more specifically historicist and more attentive to contextual discursive formations – law, banking, art history, etc. – as they impinge upon literary texts.”<sup>81</sup> James Thompson’s book *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century*

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<sup>78</sup> Marc Shell is the single most important contributor to economic criticism. His central insight is that “money, which refers to a system of tropes, is also an ‘internal’ participant in the logical or semiological organization of language, which itself refers to a system of tropes” (qtd in Woodmansee and Osteen 15).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Woodmansee and Osteen, *New Economic Criticism*, 18. See their essay in the Woodmansee and Osteen volume, titled “Symbolic economics: adventures in the metaphorical marketplace,” 408-419.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 19.

*Political Economy and the Novel* (1996) is cited as among the most sophisticated of this latter group.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, much of the critical work that falls under the umbrella of New Economic Criticism takes as its historical starting point the eighteenth-century and as its literary genre of choice the novel.<sup>83</sup>

Woodmansee and Osteen identify four areas of inquiry for New Economic Criticism: production, internal circulation, external circulation and consumption, and the metatheoretical.<sup>84</sup> I can situate this study somewhere between the first two areas. Like criticism concerned with production, this study “investigates the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which individual or related works have been produced.”<sup>85</sup> And yet, like scholarship focused on internal circulation, this study consists in large part as well of formalist readings of “the internal or intratextual ‘economies’” of texts.<sup>86</sup>

Four years after the publication of this definitive volume, Linda Woodbridge addressed the seeming dearth of economic criticism concerned with early modern literature by bringing attention to the numerous, but perhaps isolated, essays and monographs on the subject. In a collection titled *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism* (2003),

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<sup>82</sup> Woodmansee and Osteen quote Thompson’s own useful description of New Economic Criticism of the late 1990’s. He writes that it “encompasses ‘the way a whole discourse manages various kinds of knowledge,’ and it realizes that changes in economics cannot be separated from ‘a discourse or language or discipline developed to represent just such changes’” (qtd. in Woodmansee and Osteen, 20).

<sup>83</sup> Marc Shell, whose book *Money, Language, and Thought* (1982) includes chapters on the Grail tradition and *The Merchant of Venice*, is an important exception.

<sup>84</sup> Woodmansee and Osteen, *New Economic Criticism*, 35-38. External circulation and consumption is concerned with the effects of market forces the canon, aesthetic value, the marketing and selling of literature of art, literary and artistic celebrity, and economies of reading and reception (37). As its name suggests, the metatheoretical analyzes the practices of New Economic Criticism (38). Neither of these areas of inquiry figure into this study in an important way, though chapter two does consider to some extent how the circulation of a text might impact an author’s credibility in the marketplace.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 36.

Woodbridge brought together some of these practitioners (Luke Wilson, Douglas Bruster, David Hawkes, Valerie Forman, Steven Mentz, Natasha Korda, and Katherine Eisaman Maus among them) and made a case for the importance of these concerns for this period. Not only, she observed, is the period defined by the long shift of European economic systems from feudalism to proto-capitalism “at the same moment that literature, vernacular languages, religious systems, and legal systems were undergoing pronounced shifts,” but the language of the period’s literature is saturated with the vocabulary of these emerging economic forms:

Commercial language permeates even plays whose plots are not primarily money-oriented, even lyrics devoted primarily to love or to religion, even the most heroic of epics, the most elegiac of elegies. In an age when credit buying was widespread and nearly everybody was in debt, characters in plays tend to say “I am in your debt” when they simply mean “thank you.”<sup>87</sup>

Here, Woodbridge draws attention to the overlap between economic and affective vocabularies with which this study is concerned, as well as the degree to which commercial language more broadly permeates the period’s literature even where economics are not a topical concern. This fundamental characteristic of the intersection of economics and literature in the period is nonetheless overlooked at times by critics who fall back on modern modes for thinking about “the economic.” A metatheoretical essay by Douglas Bruster included in the volume laments the tendency among practitioners of New Economic Criticism “to think and write in terms of traditionally defined approaches. . . [r]ather than calling upon the full resources of this critical ensemble.”<sup>88</sup> He describes the defined approaches as “the reckoned” and “the rash.” The former “sees the economic as an object” and emphasizes “the rational and practical aspects of economic

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<sup>87</sup> Woodbridge, *Money and the Age of Shakespeare*, 10.

<sup>88</sup> Douglas Bruster, “On a Certain Tendency in Economic Criticism of Shakespeare,” *Money and the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 69.



life . . . the calculated and the specific” and “implies *homo economicus*.”<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, the rash “treats ‘the economic’ as a metaphor” and emphasizes the “irrational and thematic features” of economic life . . . the intuited and the general” and implies instead *homo ludens*.”<sup>90</sup> Bruster’s essay criticizes the tendency for critics to “think and write mainly in terms of one side or the other” which he argues “pushes us towards *generic* thinking and research.”<sup>91</sup> While this study’s emphasis on debt’s overlapping economic and affective or moral vocabularies associates it more with the realm of metaphor than object, overall its approach seeks to combine elements of both approaches. Its primary mode of approach is more positivistic than theoretical and more historicist than epistemic, characteristics Bruster attributes to “the reckoned” camp of criticism. Furthermore, the study is concerned throughout with both *homo economicus* and *homo ludens*. Indeed, a fundamental observation of this study is the degree to which early moderns did not draw the same distinctions we do between “the economic” as object and as metaphor. Based on this premise, any study of “the economic” in early modern literature that follows the language of the text must needs move back and forth between material and immaterial conceptions of what constitutes economic life and forms.

There are a number of important works of criticism that, in various ways, bridge the divide Bruster describes between the reckoned and the rash. Like this study, most of them do so through a close attention to the way a particular discourse – property law, male friendship, debt – encounters the material conditions of the new economics, and most of them are interested in the intersections of the economic and the affective. Theodore Leinwand’s *Theater, Finance, and Society in Early Modern England* (1999) analyzes dramatic texts and historical narratives from

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<sup>89</sup> Bruster, “On a Certain Tendency,” 69.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 70.

the period in order to index a range of affective responses to economic crises and opportunities.<sup>92</sup> His readings show how affective responses such as nostalgia, anger, contempt, embarrassment, tenacity, bravado and humility are used as coping strategies for dealing with the hazards of economic forms such as credit, debt, mortgaging, and capital ventures. In one respect my study is more narrow in its focus on debt. And yet, whereas Leinwand's inquiry makes the economic form causal and the affective reactive, my study is perhaps broader in its attempt to consider the mutual interaction of economic and affective forms without presuming (with some exceptions) which is primary in the text.

Lorna Hutson's book *The Usurer's Daughter*, also situated at the intersection of economic and affective relations, examines how early modern English humanism's emphasis on the exchange of persuasive rhetoric and texts created a crisis of faithfulness in the realm of male friendship, and furthermore, how fictions of women's sexual betrayals become a sign of this crisis. Hutson's study is grounded in humanist discourses of male friendship, which she defines as a relationship that is at once "an economic dependency as well as an affective bond."<sup>93</sup> Because these friendships traditionally depended upon the exchange of gifts, services, and hospitality which generated standing, long-term relationships of mutual indebtedness, they functioned as "essentially a system of credit" in which, for instance, "a lord ensured that his servant would be faithful to him . . . while the servant could trust to the future of the relationship."<sup>94</sup> However, the exchange instead of persuasive rhetoric and texts enabled men to generate similar seeming bonds without the guarantees of actual ties of kinship, alliance, or

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<sup>92</sup> Leinwand, *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-1613* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

<sup>93</sup> Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

<sup>94</sup> Hutson, *Usurer's Daughter*, 3.

service, leading to what Huston describes as “a radical lack of assurance” which haunts these relations.<sup>95</sup> The longstanding exchange of women as tokens of male alliance through marriage, as well as the specific literary humanistic tendency to generate credibility for authorship by fashioning women through persuasive fictions, position representations of women passed between men as an important indicator of the nature of male friendships. Hutson’s study shows how the rise of the culture of credit, as seen in particular in the effects of English literary humanism on the affective-economic relationships between men, can be read in the many fictions of female sexual transgression in the texts of male authors contending with the credibility issues surrounding emerging professional authorship. Hutson’s argument is foundational to my reading of Isabella Whitney’s debtor persona as a means of navigating the credit crisis that is female authorship and publication. It also informs this study’s understanding of the anxieties attending male alliances, particularly in *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*.

David Baker’s book, *On Demand: Writing for the Market in Early Modern England*, examines early modern economic thought and feeling through the central focus of “demand,” a term he understands to include both economic factors, such as buying and selling, and affective factors, indeed, “the full register of emotional responses that wanting, buying, and having calls up.”<sup>96</sup> Baker presents “demand” as an important literary critical term for understanding choices surrounding literary production as well as a necessary lens for understanding economic cognition and feeling in the period. Most influential for this study, is Baker’s observation that “growing demand in England outstripped the discourse – as we now say – that the English had to depict and explain it. The impetus behind consumption was not lacking, but the language in which to

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>96</sup> Baker, *On Demand*, xviii.

represent it coherently and consistently was.”<sup>97</sup> Baker finds that due to this gap between experience and discourse, authors often relied on paradox to grapple with the complexity presented by early modern market demand. The discourse of debt that this study describes is similarly marked by paradox and a gap between older, traditional vocabularies of morality and contemporary practice and experience. While demand was the impetus that drove the early modern market and informed choices regarding production and consumption, credit and debt provided both the currency through which the buying and selling occurred, and the affective dynamic through which relationships between authors and audiences were articulated and navigated. Baker’s subtle readings of the discourse surrounding “demand” provides a model for this study’s parsing of the often paradoxical discourse surrounding debt.

Closest to the concerns of this study is Amanda Bailey’s recent monograph *Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England* (2013), which focuses on the ethical and legal conundrums surrounding questions of personhood and property raised by the insolvent debtor’s body upon forfeiture of a penal debt bond. Bailey argues that the early modern insolvent debtor was a “symbolic and legal precursor” to the trans-Atlantic slave.<sup>98</sup> For Bailey, the central ethical question for the early modern social problem of debt is how debtors and creditors could be free to treat the debtor’s body as a form of property, a useful means for entering contracts or demanding recompense, and still respect the inherent liberty of the debtor’s personhood, a property belonging to God and unable to be ethically consumed or used up.

This study too finds the debtor’s body central to early modern discourses of debt. In addition to its function as collateral, we will see the debtor’s body serve in chapter one as a model for idealized mutual debt relations; in chapter two, as a site of suspicious circulation or

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, xvi.

<sup>98</sup> Bailey, *Of Bondage*, 145.

conspicuous consumption generating bad credit; in chapter three, as an object of punishment and revenge; and in chapters four and five, as a record of the degradations of default, imprisonment, and divestiture. My study adds to Bailey's a broader examination of questions posed by Elizabethan and Jacobean writers through their recourse to debt's rhetorical sliding scale. What do debtors and creditors owe to one another? When do affective obligations outweigh economic obligations, and vice-versa? Are debts of love and debts of money inherently different? Are they ever, or should they be, similar? Must love and self-interest be at odds, or can they cooperate? Should, or can, economic debt relations mimic the reciprocity of affective relations? Can well managed affective relations generate economic credit? Can affection satisfy economic debts? How might affection be used to manipulate economic debt relations? What happens when affective relationships get reconfigured as economic debt relations? When is it useful to conflate the two? When is it dangerous? In addition to these moral and social questions, the authors included here explore how debt's shape-shifting discourse shapes or frustrates literary form, genre, audience expectations, and authorship.

In the five chapters that follow, I show that the authors and texts included here use the early modern discourse of debt to various effects: (1) to put forward unorthodox arguments about the value of debt, (2) to try out strategies for managing actual and textual credit crises, (3) to make sophisticated critiques of the cultural tendency to conflate economic and affective relations as well as observing the dangers involved in being ruled by one at the expense of the other, and (4) to experiment with comedic and tragic dramatizations of similar debt plots in ways revealing of cultural attitudes towards both the relationships of economics and affection, and the skill of manipulating these relations.

I begin with a look at debt's tradition as a discourse shaped by paradox. Chapter One, "Sympathetic Debtors and Creditors Obligated," examines debt's shifting value as vice and virtue through its treatment as a topic of paradoxical encomia. "Panurge's Praise of Debts" in Rabelais's *Tiers Livre* (1543) and Cornwallis's adaptation thereof, "That it is Good to be in Debt" (1616), praise the orthodox vice of economic debt as a virtue by describing it as an affective and spiritual bond akin to love. Where Rabelais's paradox calls attention to its jesting, I argue that Cornwallis's adaptation shifts the balance to put forward an earnest defense of economic debt as a tie that binds. By using Rabelais's rhetorical theme to address current moral and social issues associated with England's debt problem, Cornwallis employs the *ioco-serio* paradoxical interplay of debt's vicious and virtuous associations as a polemic. The chapter is an important starting point because Rabelais's and Cornwallis's paradoxes include nearly all of the rhetorical moves and tropes employed by the debtors examined throughout. Most significantly, they include the construction of a sympathetic debtor, despite his being a vice-figure, whose redeeming qualities are at once the moral thrust of his argument and an appreciation for the rhetorical performance that calls the sincerity of that argument into question. The paradoxes also include the creditor obliged trope which figures the creditor as a friend and even servant to the debtor, due to his interest in being repaid rather than love or charity. Sympathetic debtors and creditors obliged are important features of the paradoxical nature of the early modern discourse of debt. They point up the gap between theory and practice in debt relations and law, and they demonstrate how lip service to idealized notions of affective debt relations is self-interested, manipulative, and, at the same time, the most compelling reminder of the non-economic obligations between creditors and debtors.

In the texts included here, debtors depend upon their affective relations in various ways when managing crises around debt and credit. In Chapter Two, “‘None Me Credit Dare:’ Isabella Whitney ‘s Sympathetic Debtor,” Whitney’s volume of verse relies on constructions of her persona’s well managed affective debt relations in order to legitimate both her persona’s position in London’s credit market and her own authorship. I argue that *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573) is constructed as an experimental public intervention in a personal credit crisis predicated by rumors of delinquent indebtedness and the cultural anxieties attached to single women’s market participation and exclusion: prostitution, whoredom, disease, and theft. Whitney’s text attempts to repair and generate credit by dissociating her textual persona from economic debt and these attendant tropes, embedding her “self” instead in various models of affectionate accreditation. Whitney represents and then replaces bad debts and suspect economic behavior with well managed, reciprocal affective debt relations – between herself and her textual source (Hugh Plat), her readers, family members, friends, and her beloved city of London. Through a series of counter-intuitive rhetorical strategies, *A Sweet Nosgay* transforms a credit crisis into poetic occasion to posit affection and familiarity, rather than solvency, as a basis for credibility. Whitney’s notion of affectionate accreditation is at once optimistic and cynical. In the first two sections of the volume it proffers credibility for her potentially scandalous authorship. In the final section, however, it functions primarily as a satirical critique of London’s cruel and exclusionary commercial culture.

The rhetorical shift to debt’s affective obligations is the subject of critique in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. Chapter Three, “True Interest and the Affections: the Dangers of Lawful Lending in *The Merchant of Venice*,” shows how Shakespeare exposes the dangers entailed in aligning affective and economic relations too closely. The chapter reads the

often overlooked distinction between interest and usury back into Shakespeare's play revealing its focus on the dangers of Christian lending practices. True interest, a lawful compensation for default, derived legitimacy from its conceptual basis in idealized Christian affections: amity, trust, and mercy. Shylock adopts this Christian model of "kind" lending in his bond with Antonio as a means for lawful revenge. In his alternative penalty of a pound of flesh, Shylock's bond gestures metonymically to the practice of imprisoning the debtor's body when interest could not be collected. Interest's legitimating affections provide a lawful conveyance and screen for the destructive passions that motivate lending in the play: Shylock's vengeance and Antonio's prodigal self-sacrifice. Portia's pragmatic revision of interest as self-love ironically counters the destructive passions inscribed in Christian love and true interest. By aligning and balancing her affections with her economic interests, Portia proves the play's most successful emotional and economic agent.

Successfully balancing affective and economic obligations is the trademark of the city comedy sympathetic debtor. Chapter Four, "Reading the Unkind Household in City Comedy," identifies two related conventions of city comedy that depend upon debt's interrelated emotive and economic structures. First I describe the unkind household common to the genre, in which domestic and familial relationships are reorganized according to the logic and ethos of the marketplace. The unkind household is marked by a prevailing confusion regarding who is "kind" and who "strange," what is owed to whom, and which obligations outweigh others. Secondly, I argue that the clever debtor-protagonists of these plays are good readers of the ways in which other characters use debt's overlapping discourses. In Thomas Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* and *A Chaste Main in Cheapside*, and J. Cooke's *Greene's Tu Quoque*, the debtor-protagonists ultimately triumph, achieving comedic resolutions to their debt plots, by out-



manipulating their creditors and competitors even as they strike a balance between their economic and affective obligations in a way that recognizes the importance of satisfying both. Following these readings, I turn to two plays that do not strictly fit the genre of city comedy, but that contain many of the genre's defining ingredients: debt plots with all their stock characters and a similar concern with affective relationships turned unkind by an economic ethos: Thomas Heywood's chronicle history, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part 2* and Philip Massinger's comedy *A New Way To Pay Old Debts*. Here we see how the debt plots of city comedy, and the skills of versatility and clever manipulation that make for city comedy heroes, play differently when removed from the context of the city. These plays expand the depiction of unkind affective relations to those vertical relations of stewardship, service and loyalty up and down the social hierarchy, and importantly, take us into the country – *If You Know Not Me*, briefly, and *A New Way*, for the entirety of the play. Rather than reveling in the rhetorical manipulations and social mobility of the city, these plays convey a nostalgic regard for the reciprocal hierarchical ties that structure the traditional social order. This order is threatened in these plays by a social mobility underwritten by debt and its rhetorical slipperiness, and the commercial perversion of household and social virtues: hospitality, charity, and thrift. In the country these elements threaten to take a generic turn to tragedy. Comedic resolution is ultimately achieved, however, because those characters in a position to help or harm the plays' debtors either learn how to balance economic and affective obligations from the debtor, or they are overcome by the debtor's own deft ability to do so. Here then the rhetorical trick of conflating debt's economic and affective obligations is, on the one hand, a suspect symptom of predatory avarice and stability-threatening social climbing, and on the other, the very lesson the

various creditors and usurers of these plays need to learn for the threatened social order to be restored.

Chapter Five, “Kindness that Kills: Tragic Misreadings of Debt,” reads two plays whose protagonists are not good readers of debt: Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and Shakespeare and Middleton’s *Timon of Athens*. These plays share many of the qualities of chapter four’s comedies: same authors, close dates of composition, debt plots populated by unkind households. Like Middleton’s and Cooke’s comedies, *A Woman Killed* focuses on domestic and familial relations, while *Timon* extends this to civic/community relations like Heywood’s and Massinger’s. And yet these plays are tragedies. They provide an opportunity to examine how debt plots populated by similar character types, dramatizing similar problems within similar milieus take a different generic trajectory. The chapter concludes that these debt plots are ultimately tragic because their protagonists are naïve readers of debt. They fall prey to the rhetorical manipulations surrounding their debt relations which they fundamentally misunderstand to be wholly affective. Often these manipulations are their own and proceed from their confusion about the true nature of the debt relations they enter. The failures of kindness between debtors and creditors in these plays are catastrophic events that demand retribution and sacrifice before alliances can be restored, those threats of revenge and violence which always lurk beneath debt relations in this period.

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By the late seventeenth century, “economics” and economic relations would be well on the road towards existing as a discrete, presumably impersonal category of human behavior. But during the late sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries, the emerging forms and ethos of a pervasive market culture coexisted with the residual forms and ethos of a traditional

agrarian culture. The discourse of debt circulating in the literature of the period enabled early moderns to navigate crises of debt and credit with reference to the full range of debt's moral and rhetorical values, to shift back and forth between conceptions of debt as vice and as virtue, as primarily affective or primarily economic, as a spiritual bond between men or as a legal bond enforceable by bodily suffering. These texts deploy this discourse to achieve both moralistic and self-interested ends: to resist disenfranchisement by reorienting the basis of credibility, on the one hand, and to perpetually defer payment by reorganizing debt relations, on the other. Through its inscription into law with the 1571 *Act Against Usury*, this discourse enables the advancement of predatory lending as an acceptable violation of traditional social obligations. At the same time, its inscription into genres such as city comedy and domestic tragedy show the discourse to be a rhetorical antidote for the worst excesses of both economic and affective debt relations. On a broader scale, this project reveals a relationship between economic and affective bonds that is more complex than we have previously understood. As the two begin to move towards increasingly distinct fields, the implications of their shared rhetorical and conceptual basis become imbued with an unprecedented signifying power for social intervention. My dissertation not only maps the various sites where this dynamic vocabulary comes into being, it also considers the real effects, in shifting material and perceptual registers, that are its result.

CHAPTER ONE

Sympathetic Debtors and Creditors Obligated: the Paradoxical Praise of Debt

“This was sometime a paradox,
but now the time gives it proof.” –*Hamlet* (3.1.117-18)

If one can speak of a rhetorical tradition of debt, it might be summed up in a single word: paradox; for discourses of debt invariably contain conceptions of debt as vice *and* virtue. In early modern England, this tradition became a common literary recourse for exploring and testing the social and moral ambiguities involved in an ever expanding culture of debt and credit. William Cornwallis’s 1616 paradoxical encomium “That it is Good to be in Debt” is a text that exploits this tradition in its jocoserious defense of debt, circulating tropes and rhetorical strategies borrowed from mock encomiasts and satirists which come to earnest employments in the context of the contemporary debt problem. Hence, as debt became a salient feature of early modern English life, its paradoxes were brought into contention with its orthodox valuation as vice.

Economic debt is a proverbial vice. Third of the three Delphic axioms on the walls of the legendary Oracle’s temple warned against involvement in debts and litigation: *Sponde noxa praesto est*, “Stand surety, and ruin is at hand.”¹ As we have seen, one of the earliest texts in the canon, Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, admonishes and advises an idle debtor named Perses on matters of good husbandry. Erasmus’s compendium of classical wisdom, the *Adagia*, includes two adages that speak directly to the miseries of debt, and the commentaries of each are laced

¹ As Erasmus translated it, also paraphrased by Pliny as ‘misery is the bedfellow of debt and litigation.’ See Erasmus’s adage I vi 97 in *Collected Works of Erasmus Vol.32*, trans. R.A.B. Mynors et al, ed. Alexander Dalzell et al, (Toronto, 1974), p. 64-5. M.A. Screech renders it, “The companion of borrowing and litigation is wretchedness,” in *Rabelais* (Ithaca; New York, 1979), 227. The first two maxims translate (more famously) as “Know thyself” and “Nothing to excess.”

with the weighty names of Greek and Roman thinkers who have contributed to the body of debt-as-vice *sententiae*.² Classically, debt is closely linked to the vice of lying. In the language of the Bible, debt is a synonym for sin.

But alongside this orthodoxy, indeed intricately bound up with it, is a paradoxical tradition of debt in which the vice of debt encounters alternative models or connotations of debt that signify culturally as virtuous: debt as duty within a larger cosmic, social, and familial order, for instance; the principle of reciprocity; Christian love, charity, and forgiveness. These models seem easily distinguished as economic debts, or debts of money, on the one hand, and affective, moral and spiritual debts, on the other; these I will refer to as debts of love. But as thinkers from Plato to Marc Shell have shown, these seemingly distinct realms are always in conversation with one another.³ An encounter with a discourse of either model invariably implies the other. Thus, much of debt's rhetorical tradition consists of implicit paradox. Works that condemn economic debt as vice often insist on the importance of civil and spiritual bonds and obligations. So while Hesiod's *Works and Days* faults Perses for not paying his debts, it also reminds him how important it is to create debt amongst neighbors. Similarly, in his 1569 selection from Erasmus's *Adagia*, Richard Taverner annotates the adage "Be suretie for an other and harme is at hande" with the following mixed message: "What loss: what utter undoing, commeth by suretiship, who knoweth not. Albeit, I graunt, a man must beare with his friend, and in case of necessitie also

² For adage I vi 97 ("Stand surety and ruin is at hand"), Erasmus notes that Pliny wrote on the maxim in his *Naturalis historia*, and that Homer speaks to the idea in his *Odyssey*, as does Plutarch in his *Moralia* (32: 64-5). *Collected Works of Erasmus: Adages*, Vol. 32, trans. R.A.B. Mynors et al, ed. Alexander Dalzell et al, (Toronto, 1974-), pp. 64-5. For II vii 98 ("Happy is he who owes nothing"), Erasmus references Plutarch's essay "That we ought not to borrow" (The *De vitando aere alieno* in the *Moralia*), Herodotus, and a Greek epigram attributed to Automedon: "'First on the list of happy men is he who owes no one anything, second the bachelor, third he who is childless' (34:46)." *Collected Works of Erasmus: Adages*, Vol. 34, p. 46.

³ See Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (Baltimore, 1978) and *Money, Language, and Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London; 1982). Also, Kurt Heinzelman, *The Economics of the Imagination* (Amherst, 1980).

with the poore and needie.”⁴ Involvement in borrowing and lending is here both a misery, which is as often to say a vice, and a dictate of friendship and charity. Perhaps the most exemplary instance of debt’s mixed message is to be found in Matthew’s Paternoster: “And forgive us our dettes, as we also forgive our detters” (*Geneva*, Matt. 6:12). If debt is synonymous with sin, it also signifies that which must be forgiven in recognition of what we owe to “Our Father.”

Debt is also a common theme of formal paradox, most often in the form of the paradoxical encomium, a defense or praise of an “unexpected, unworthy, or indefensible subject.”⁵ Rosalie Colie has identified debt as a paradoxical theme with classical precedent.⁶ The topic was treated by paradoxical encomiasts throughout the early modern period as well.⁷ One of the earliest of these extant early modern paradoxical encomia of debt, and the example best known to modern readers, was written in 1543 by Francois Rabelais. “Panurge’s Praise of Debts” appears in the *Tiers Livre of Gargantua and Pantagruel*. It comes from the mouth of Rabelais’s

⁴ Taverner, *Proverbes or Adagies, gathered out of the Chiliades of Erasmus by Richarde Taverner, With newe addicions as well of Latyne proverbs as of Englishe* (London, 1569), 20.

⁵ Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: the Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1976), 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁷ Erasmus’s colloquy “The Ignoble Knight, or False Nobility” (1529) contains a mock praise of debt. Francesco Berni’s paradox, “In lode del debito,” in *I Capitoli* (1537). Rabelais’s “Praise of debts” in the *Tiers Livre* (1543). Colie cites debt as one of Ortensio Lando’s subjects. It is not, however, the explicit topic of any of the thirty paradoxes included in his *Paradossi* (1543). It is mentioned in his paradox of exile and thematically bears a close relation to his paradoxes of poverty and imprisonment. Perhaps he treated the theme more explicitly elsewhere. Robert Turner’s Neo-Latin paradox “*Encomium Debiti*” written in the 1580s, with extant printings in 1601 and in the 1619 collection of paradoxes titled *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Socraticae Joco-seriae* by Caspar Dornavius. Turner’s paradox of debt is included under the categorical section of “Mendicitas” or Poverty, which includes eight other paradoxes that treat this theme. Ben Jonson adapts Erasmus’s mock praise of debt in *Everyman Out of his Humor* (1599). Cornwallis, with whom I am herein concerned, penned two paradoxes of debt: “That it is a Happiness to be in Debt” (MS only until 1931, see Bennett) and “That it is Good to be in Debt” (1616). Only the second draws on material from Panurge’s Praise. Thomas Jordan plagiarized Cornwallis’s “That it is Good to be in Debt” as *The Debtors Apologie, or, A Quaint Paradox Proving that it is good to be in debt, and (in this age) may be useful for all men* (1644) (See Garrett). The miscellany *Athenian Sport, or Two Thousand Paradoxes Merrily Argued to Amuse and Divert the Age* (1707) includes a paradox titled “Tis a Happiness to be in Debt” which echoes Cornwallis’s “That it is Good.” If one includes the topics of poverty, imprisonment, and beggary, the number of relevant paradoxes increases dramatically.

fool, Panurge, and is condemned by his hero, Pantagruel. Panurge's praise is a mock encomium, which is to say, a false praise. Like most encomia of "things without honor," Panurge's praise is an exercise in rhetorical prowess and sophistry. As Sidney observes in his *Defence of Poesie*, "we know a playing wit can praise the discretion of an ass, the comfortableness of being in debt, and the jolly commodities of being sick of the plague."⁸

William Cornwallis's paradox borrows much of its argument from "Panurge's Praise of Debts," translating the ambiguity and duplicity of Rabelais's mediated rhetorical play into an unmediated moral defense of economic debt. By taking Panurge's argument out of the mouth of a fool, and by addressing debt as a contemporary social problem as well as a rhetorical theme, Cornwallis produces a paradox of debt that, while still jocoserious in tone, reads as an earnest defense.

In what follows, I will trace how debt's paradoxical tradition and its rise as a social and moral problem encounter one another in Cornwallis's 1616 text. For Cornwallis and his contemporaries, debt's rhetorical tradition as paradox has immediate cultural significance. As economic debt with its vice status becomes problematic in early modern culture, it threatens to pull away, rhetorically and behaviorally, from debt's affective or virtuous connotations and applications. Cornwallis's text documents what I suggest is a broader rhetorical and cultural response to the problem of debt in the period: a shift away from an emphasis on debt as vice and towards an emphasis on debt as paradox, as a bond that carries the potential for vice (deceit, fraud, excess, self-interest), as well as the opportunity for goodwill, charity and kinship. Cornwallis's "That it is Good to be in Debt" demonstrates how the traditionally ironic praise of debt offers earnest rhetorical strategies for negotiating the emerging early modern culture of debt

⁸ As quoted by Arthur Stanley Pease, "Things Without Honor," *Classical Philology*, Vol. 21 (1926), 41.

and credit.⁹ Furthermore, it demonstrates how those connotations of economic language often deemed ‘figurative’ or ‘metaphorical’ serve as important constructions for cultural responses to the changing socio-economic landscape.¹⁰

The Problem of Debt

As we saw in the introduction, debt was quickly becoming a widespread social problem in late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century England. Litigation among creditors and debtors was at an all time high, and England’s statutory law enacted the harshest penalty for debt defaults to be found in Europe: indefinite imprisonment of the debtor’s body at the discretion of the creditor.¹¹ A 1622 Debtors’ Petition to King James and Parliament acknowledges the severity of England’s penal law: “So that, imprisonment of mens bodies for Debt, according to the practice of England, is a greater burthen and bondage, then is to be found in any other Christian or Heathen Country” (27-8).¹²

⁹ For descriptions of how rhetorical/textual play and performance are used in the accumulation of credit and management of credit relations, see Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer’s Daughter* (London and New York, 1994) and Jean E. Howard’s “Credit, Incarceration and Performance: Staging London’s Debtors’ Prisons,” in *Theater of a City: the Places of London Comedy, 1598-1642* (Philadelphia, 2007), pp. 68-113. Hutson contends that with the rise of humanism, the gift-pledge once exchanged as a bond of good faith between men is replaced with the persuasive text which generates “greater access to credibility, to being *believed* by strangers who may then become ‘friends’ (6)—keeping in mind Hutson’s observation that early modern friendship “is evidently an economic dependency as well as an affective bond” (3). An important effect of this rhetoricized bond, is an underlying insecurity of good faith. Howard’s chapter examines the staging of debtors’ prisons in various plays. Her readings of *Eastward Ho* and *Greene’s Tu Quoque* respectively demonstrate how the theatrically skilled debtor can repair his credit through the performance of reformation and how the “performative prowess” of prodigals becomes an alternative to financial credit (99-113).

¹⁰ In referring to the non-economic connotations of economic language as those sometimes deemed ‘figurative’ or ‘metaphorical,’ I do not intend to make its economic signification primary or prior.

¹¹ For discussions regarding the imprisonment of debtors in England, see Raymond A. Anselment, “*The Confinement: The Plight of the Imprisoned English Debtor in the Seventeenth-Century*,” *Restoration* 15 (1991): 1-16; Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 287-88; and Amanda Bailey, “*Timon of Athens*, Forms of Payback, and the Genre of Debt,” *ELR* Vol. 41, Issue 2 (Spring 2011), 378-80.

¹² Anonymous, *A Petition to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, the Lords Spirituall and Temporall, and Commons of the Parliament now assembled, Wherein is declared the mischiefes and inconueniences, arising to the King and Common-wealth, by the Imprisoning of mens bodies for Debt* (London, 1622).

Debt relations rewrote traditional social relations and led to widespread downward social mobility, as tailors and mercers, as often as not, litigated and imprisoned their social superiors.¹³ Longstanding associations of debt with prodigality and vice, and new anxieties about paying for another's consumption of luxury goods, contended with sympathy conjured by the excessive cruelty of debtors' prisons and a sense of moral nostalgia for a time—real or imagined—when neighborliness and charity outweighed economic expediency.¹⁴ In other words, popular attitudes towards debt were conflicted along the lines of debt's own paradoxical tradition. The problem of debt created a tension between penalizing the vice and honoring certain social and moral obligations: neighborliness, charity, and Christian forgiveness. Furthermore, the pervasiveness of indebtedness, which spanned the social spectrum from servant to crown, meant that most early modern individuals identified as debtors.¹⁵ Indeed many were simultaneously debtors *and* creditors, sympathetic to the plight of fellow debtors but anxious to recover loans in order to satisfy their own creditors.¹⁶ Thus, it might be said that, in early modern England, debt was *experienced* as paradox.

¹³ See Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 97-98.

¹⁴ Muldrew writes, "Many began to worry that they might end up paying for the purchase of luxury goods or the good living of their socially ambitious neighbours, if the latter overestimated the profits of their business or labour and were eventually unable to meet their obligations" (*Economy of Obligation*, 4). R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, (Gloucester, Mass; 1962), describes the gradual secularization of economic behavior in which the ideal shifts from Christian standards of moral conduct towards economic expediency. Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London, 1965) suggests that while we might identify exploitation and oppression in the economic arrangements of pre-industrial England, these social relations had the benefit of "the extraordinarily cohesive influence which familial relationships carry with them." Within the social organization of pre-industrial England, "every relationship could be seen as a love-relationship" (4-5).

¹⁵ Muldrew observes that during this period, "the debt of the Crown increased dramatically and reached 900,000 pounds by 1618" (*Economy of Obligation*, 97).

¹⁶ See Linda Woodbridge, *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in Economic Criticism* (New York 2003), 10; Wrightson, *English Society*, 60-1; and Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 95-8. Muldrew writes, "Every household in the country, from those of paupers to the royal household, was to some degree enmeshed within the increasingly complicated webs of credit and obligation with which transactions were communicated" (95).

The paradoxical tradition of debt I am describing demonstrates a longstanding intermingling and tension between debt's spiritual and monetary connotations. As Craig Muldrew has established, early modern credit was at once an emotional and economic currency:

Today the word credit is used in two basic ways. One refers to a person's reputation, the estimate in which his or her character is held, their repute or trustworthiness. The other usage, ironically, simply stems from a reductionist utilitarian economic model of human economic behavior in which motivation is reduced to calculable desire for things, profits and property. [...] I shall argue that this linguistic distinction had not yet arisen in the seventeenth century and that only the first meaning existed, stemming from the Latin *credo*: to believe or trust. To be a creditor in an economic sense still had a strong social and ethical meaning. Most credit was extended between individual emotional agents, and it means that you were willing to trust someone to pay you in the future. Similarly, to have credit in a community meant that you could be trusted to pay back your debts.¹⁷

Muldrew asserts here that no clear distinction had yet been made between credit as moral character and credit as an economic value. Indeed, early modern credit and, more broadly, early modern "economics" might be usefully understood as an example of Marcel Mauss's conception of total social phenomena, containing "all the threads of which the social fabric is composed" and in which "all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral, and economic."¹⁸ However, I suggest that the early modern experience of debt was also shaped by a cultural 'pulling apart' of its economic and spiritual values, that the widespread recourse to litigation and imprisonment against delinquent debtors created a social and moral dilemma that might be said to have encouraged the depersonalization of economic behavior, which preceded the eventual reconfiguration of economics as a discrete category. What I am interested in is the role debt's paradoxical tradition played in providing anxiously insistent reminders of the spiritual and moral dimensions of debt.

¹⁷ Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 3.

¹⁸ Mauss, *The Gift*, 1.

Early Modern Paradox

Let us consider the significance of the form before the content. As described by Rosalie Colie, there was a vogue tantamount to an epidemic of paradox in early modern England and continental Europe.¹⁹ The period's affinity for and proliferation of the form was a product of its intellectual environment. Colie suggests that "[paradoxes] tend to constellate, [...] in a period, like the Renaissance, of intense intellectual activity, with many different ideas and systems in competition with one another."²⁰ However trivial its theme, paradox is always about competing value systems, "always somehow involved in dialectic: challenging some orthodoxy."²¹ The dialectics of paradox move between received opinion and radical alternatives. Paradox took various forms in this period, and these can be organized by their intended relationship to received opinion, or orthodoxy. The most common form, mock encomia, praise their dishonorable topics against received opinion, traditionally with the goal of actually affirming received opinion through irony. Strictly speaking then, mock encomia hold received opinion to be 'true' and rely on its authority for their proper interpretation.²² But this was not the only kind of paradox circulating in the period. In the same year that Rabelais's *Tiers Livre* was published in France, Ortensio Lando published a collection of paradoxes titled *Paradossi* in Italy. Lando's paradoxes were Ciceronian, based on the style of paradox found in the *Paradoxa Stoicorum*. In this model, the paradoxical encomium argues against received opinion in earnest, for it held opinion to be

¹⁹ Colie, *Paradoxia*. Also, see Arthur Stanley Pease, "Things Without Honor," *Classical Philology* Vol. 21 (1926), pp. 27-42; Henry Knight Miller, "The Paradoxical Encomium with Special Reference to its Vogue in England 1600-1800," *Modern Philology* Vol. 53, No. 3 (Feb 1956), pp. 145-78; Peter G. Platt, *Shakespeare and the Culture of Paradox* (Surry & Burlington, 2009).

²⁰ Colie, *Paradoxia*, 33.

²¹ *Ibid*, 10.

²² It must be observed, however, that Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (1511), the most exemplary and influential mock encomium of the period, challenges this straightforward formula.

false.²³ Reprinted and translated many times over, Lando's collection was widely influential.²⁴ Rabelais's paradox of debt and Lando's *Paradossi*, then, exemplify the two types of rhetorical paradox common in the period: the mock encomium and the Ciceronian paradox.²⁵ It is important to note that theoretical paradoxes of the period, such as the Copernican Paradox, also argued earnestly against received opinion. As Colie observes, here "paradox was the scientific term for a new hypothesis, a new suggestion making old truths untrue, an undoing of an old understanding."²⁶ Paradox, then, so often associated with play, actually ran the gamut from mocking ambiguity to serious intellectual assertion, making and un-making orthodoxy.

Despite this neat schema of kind, the degree to which any given paradox ultimately affirms or challenges received opinion often lies beyond the intent of the paradoxist.²⁷ Take the case of Gorgias' Praise of Helen (4th century BCE), a mock encomium that demonstrates how the form's strategy can misfire in its effects. According to Colie, Gorgias's Praise "originally classified as a paradox because Helen was so obviously 'bad' soon became a traditional encomium of the perfectly beautiful woman, and entirely lost its paradoxical nature. Gorgias had

²³ See Michele V. Ronnick, *Cicero's Paradoxa Stoicorum* (Frankfurt am Main; New York, 1991), pp. 12-19 and Helen Peters, "Introduction," *Paradoxes and Problems*, John Donne (Oxford, 1980), xvi-xix.

²⁴ Colie observes, "[e]ven for paradoxists who never held Lando's book in their hands, his list provided the Ur-manual of their subjects. Lando set the tune to which scores of paradoxists wrote their careful variations." *Paradoxia Epidemica*, 461-2.

²⁵ Where Cicero was the classical model for Lando, Lucien was the model for Erasmus, and thereby Rabelais and other early modern mock encomiasts.

²⁶ Colie, *Paradoxia*, 308.

²⁷ Deborah Losse writes, "Because of the elusive nature of irony, certain mock encomia have proved hard to classify," *Rhetoric at Play: Rabelais and Satirical Eulogy* (Berne; Las Vegas, 1980), p. x. For Pease, it is at times even difficult to distinguish between formal encomia and paradoxical encomia: "Just where the boundaries lie between the ordinary encomium and adoxography it is not always easy to say, for what to one reader may seem the sincere praise of a worthy object to another may appear but hollow bombast," "Things Without Honor," 33.

been too persuasive.”²⁸ As Colie puts it, “paradox became orthodox.”²⁹ It was this potential that led authors of paradoxical encomia to anxiously preface their work with extended explanations and precedents intended to teach their readers how to interpret the form.³⁰ And yet this instability also enabled paradox to do important cultural work. If the intention was indeed to challenge orthodoxy, paradox provided protection. If the paradoxist wished to avoid any particular philosophical position, paradox authorized duplicity and equivocation (Colie 5, 38). Thus, praising paradoxical themes as unlikely as folly or debt offered opportunities for earnest social criticisms to be put forward.

Cornwallis and Panurge

Sir William Cornwallis, the younger, was a courtier and a published essayist who wrote as a gentleman amateur writer.³¹ Though he has fallen into relative obscurity by comparison, Cornwallis has the distinction of rivaling Francis Bacon as the earliest English familiar essayist and John Donne as the earliest English paradoxical essayist.³² Between 1600 and 1604, Cornwallis published two essay collections, a discourse on Seneca the tragedian, and a speech he delivered before Parliament on the union of England and Scotland. All of these works enjoyed

²⁸ Colie, *Paradoxia*, 278. And this, despite Gorgias’ own declaration that his praise of Helen had indeed been a joke. See Annette Tomarken, *The Smile of Truth: the French satirical eulogy and its antecedents* (Princeton, 1990), 11.

²⁹ Colie, *Paradoxia*, 8.

³⁰ Tomarken observes that “authorial anxiety about possible misreading seems to have been at times most acute in the vice eulogies.” Some mock-encomiasts actually published counter serious encomia to clear any confusion caused by their mock-encomia. *Smile of Truth*, 11.

³¹ Not to be confused, as Arthur Kincaid warns in his *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* article, with his uncle, William Cornwallis, the elder, (1551-1611), a known friend to Ben Jonson (par. 2).

³² Arthur Kincaid, “Cornwallis, Sir William, the younger (c.1579-1614),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

enough popularity to see several editions.³³ But Cornwallis did not deign to publish his paradoxes in his lifetime. Rather, he circulated them among friends and kin, presenting them as recreation. In a letter to his kinsman, Sir John Hobarth, Cornwallis writes that he would not have the paradoxes known for his, and “in keeping them secreatt have sh[ew]ed some littill discretion.”³⁴ But two years after his death at thirty-five, a collection of Cornwallis’s paradoxes appeared in print as *Essayes of Certain Paradoxes* (1616). Michael Price observes that “[r]emarks by Cornwallis’ father as well as confessions in Cornwallis’ *Essayes* (1600) indicate that Cornwallis lived extravagantly, reducing him to a state of penury from which he was never to escape.”³⁵ With his early death, Cornwallis left a wife and eight children destitute,³⁶ and these paradoxes found their way into the hands of printers. Six of Cornwallis’s paradoxes appeared in three editions between 1616 and 1617, and thus “That it is Good to be in Debt” entered public circulation.³⁷

³³ Cornwallis’s published titles are *Essays* (1600) and *The Second Part of Essays* (1601), *Discourses upon Seneca the Tragedian* (1601), and *The miraculous and happie union of England and Scotland* (1604). His *Essayes* and *Discourses* had several individual and combined printings throughout the first decade and again in 1632.

³⁴ Quoted in R. E. Bennett, “Four Paradoxes by Sir William Cornwallis, the Younger,” *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 13 (1931), 220.

³⁵ Michael W. Price, “Sir William Cornwallis the Younger,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography* Vol. 151 (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research, 1978), 83.

³⁶ Kinkaid, “Cornwallis,” 3.

³⁷ Cornwallis’s published paradoxes include, from *Essayes of Certain Paradoxes*, “The Prayse of King Richard the Third,” “The Prayse of the French Pockes,” “The Prayse of Nothing,” “That it is Good to be in Debt” and, from *Essayes, or rather, Encomions*, “Prayse of Sadnesse” and “Prayse of the Emperour Julian the Apostata.” We know that Cornwallis wrote other paradoxes that went unpublished. R.E. Bennett discovered and published four of these for the first time in 1931. See R.E. Bennett, “Four Paradoxes by Sir William Cornwallis, the Younger,” *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 13, pp. 210-40. Among these is another paradox of debt, titled “That it is a Happiness to be in Debt.” Based on some of its references, Bennett suggests “That it is a Happiness” is the earlier attempt. The two paradoxes share no material, the earlier relying primarily on Stoic moralizing and historical examples. Bennett suggests that Cornwallis’s earlier paradoxes “establish, better than Donne’s work, or Cornwallis’s later paradoxes, the great indebtedness of the English paradox to the *Paradossi* of Ortensio Lando” (221). The concluding paragraph of “That it is a Happiness” does hint at the strategy employed by the later “That it is Good,” however. Here, Cornwallis observes debt’s conflicted rhetorical tradition and turns it around as evidence of economic debt’s virtue:

Because of its posthumous publication, Cornwallis's collection of paradoxes lacks the benefit of an anxiously instructive preface. The opening paragraph of "That it is Good it to be in Debt," however, overtly aligns the paradox with the Ciceronian model:

We are fallen into that dotage of the World, in which, the worst things doe overtop the worthiest, sense doth besot the understanding, drinke overcommeth the braine, and the eye beguyleth and misleadeth the sight. And therefore in tender commiseration of mankind, I will endeavour to rectifie their judgment in a Paradox, then which there hath none more intricate, been discussed and canvassed among the Stoicks in Zenos porch, that is, That it is better for a man to live in debt, then otherwise. (par. 1)

The reference to the Stoicks in Zeno's Porch invokes the tradition of the *Paradoxa Storicorum*, and thus Lando, paradoxists who write in earnest against received opinion.³⁸ Considering Cornwallis's topic, the comparison reads as an ironic one. And yet the reference also reminds readers that paradoxes sometimes serve this earnest function and invites readers to entertain the argument as a paradox of this sort as part of its jocoserious play. True to the form, Cornwallis

In a word the/ excellency of beinge in debt is verie apparent/ since in all our ordinary speeches we borrow/ the Termes. As we owe to *God* a debt: *God*/ lent us our lives and to hime they are due, I am/indebted to you for your kindenes: I owe you the/ best of my affections with infinite others, all which/ apparently testifie it[s] worth: since then those/ that most raile on it, are compelled for/ expressinge of the most excellent thinges to borrowe/ the wordes: I see no reason why such as are capable/ of *Reason* shoulde not alter their opinions for others/ that are Ingenious enough of themselves/ this little which I haue saide is more then enough. (qtd in Bennett 230)

Also published by Bennett are the paradoxes "That a great redd nose is an ornament to the face," "That miserie is True Felicity," and "That Inconstancy is more commendable then Constancie."

³⁸ Though few critics have written on Cornwallis's paradoxes, with the exception of his "Prayse of King Richard the Third," those that have tend to follow Bennett in reading the earlier paradoxes as the more earnest, and the later published paradoxes as mock encomia, excepting his defenses of historical figures, which have been described as serious. It should be noted, however, that none of these studies examine "That it is Good to be in Debt" specifically. Peters observes that Sir William Cornwallis "wrote both mock encomiums which were published in three editions in 1616 and 1617 of subjects such as sadness, the French pox, and King Richard III, and also Paradoxes that argued against received opinion, namely, 'That a great red nose is an ornament to the face', 'That it is a happiness to be in debt', 'That miserie is true Felicity' and 'That Inconstancy is more commendable then Constancie'" (xxi). Though she does not include "That it is Good to be in Debt" in her list of Cornwallis's mock encomia, her distinction between the earlier and later paradoxes, like Bennett's (see fn 24), would make "That it is Good" a mock encomium. In his *Dictionary of Literary Biography* entry on Cornwallis, Michael Price describes "That it is Good to be in Debt" (along with the praises of the French Pox and Nothing) as "brief . . . ironic, playful jeux d'esprit in the manner of the prevailing modes of paradox, the mock encomium and the argument against received opinion" (86). Kincaid writes, "the paradoxes range from satirical praise of misfortunes (the French pox, debt) to what seem at least partly serious defences of historical figures (Julian the Apostate, Richard III). The essay on Richard III is the first extant attempt at a defence of that king" (Price, par. 2).

intends to “rectifie [mankind’s] judgment” with his paradox—specifically the notion that debt is a vice or a misery to be avoided. Considering the pervasiveness of debt in the period – that it was unavoidable for most early modern households – some readers may have needed little prompting to humor a revaluation of the classic vice. Cornwallis adapts a mock praise. His material is ironic; his attitude is mocking. But the implications of the commentary he offers concerning this social problem warrants serious consideration.

Cornwallis begins this revaluation by describing debt as the basis for an interrelated cosmos:

In the whole course and frame of Nature, we see that nothing is made for it selfe, but each hath a bond of duty, of use or of service, by which it is indebted to other. The sunne by his splendor to lighten all the world; by his warmth and heate, to cherish and comfort each living and vegetable thing. Yea, man himselfe is so framed of God, that not onely his Countrey, his Parents and his friends claime a share in him, but he is also indebted to his dogge, and to his Oxe., to teach the one to hunt for his pleasure, the other to labour for his profit: so that *quicquid habet genii, ingenii, moris, amoris*, the abilities of his spirit, the affections of his mind, he hath them for others as much as for himselfe; nay the more for others, by how much hee desireth to be the greater Lord over others. (par. 2)

Cornwallis defines debt as “a bond of duty, of use, or of service” and presents it as the organizing principle in this model of cosmic and social order characterized by hierarchy and degree as well as interdependent relationships amongst its parts. Thus, Cornwallis conceptualizes debt in terms of the traditional Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology. Doing so enables him to naturalize debt and allows for the conflation of its affective and economic connotations by providing a rhetoric of correspondence in which economic indebtedness can be praised in terms of spiritual and metaphysical reciprocity. Cornwallis begins his defense of economic debt, then, with reference to spiritual and affective bonds. Importantly, he provides the example of a Lord who, like the Sun, has splendid attributes in order to lend them to others. Indeed, the position and power of this Lord is placed in direct relation to the extent to which his attributes are “for others as much as for himselfe; nay the more for others.” In effect, Cornwallis sets up noblesse oblige

as an idealized model for debt relations. Much of the encomium to follow is concerned with this idealized conception of borrowing and lending as the foundation for good social relations, an answer to the widespread social discord – and social mobility – resulting from debt, default, litigation, imprisonment, and penalties. Cornwallis's unorthodox revaluation of debt is not so radical after all. On the contrary, it responds to the changing socio-economic landscape with a nostalgic regard for feudal affective-economic relations, much like the country estate poem inaugurated by Jonson's "To Penshurst" in the same year this paradox first appeared in print.

Cornwallis's argument and rhetorical strategy are taken in large part from Rabelais's paradox, "Panurge's Praise of Debts." Panurge defends his economic indebtedness with an argument that relies similarly on a slippery register of debt's various connotations: as duty and service, as charity and love, as reciprocity, as well as money owed.³⁹ Moving between these meanings as though they were all of a piece is supported by the logic of correspondence provided by Panurge's depiction of an ordered, analogous cosmos organized on the principle of indebtedness figured as stratified reciprocity.⁴⁰ Cornwallis takes much, indeed most, of his paradox directly from Rabelais's mock encomium, but alludes only to the Ciceronian models. While Panurge's persuasive sophistry is ultimately corrected by the moral authority of Pantagruel, Cornwallis's readers lack the benefit of instruction, aside from the Ciceronian analogy, and have no notion that the argument they are being asked to entertain is taken from the mouth of a fool.

³⁹ Walter Kaiser writes that Panurge's debt can be understood as "a synonym for love itself, that love which is *caritas*," *Praisers of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 132. For Colie, Panurge's conception of debt includes "circulation and mutual exchange on all levels," especially money and marriage, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, 55.

⁴⁰ M.A. Screech reads Panurge's claim that the universe is held together by mutual indebtedness as a misapplication of Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* in which love is given this distinction (*Rabelais*, 226).

In the context of the *Tiers Livre*, Panurge's praise is not allowed to stand. While acknowledging Panurge's "beautiful representations and descriptions" (274), Rabelais's wise humanist prince, Pantagruel quickly returns us to orthodoxy by reminding Panurge of debt's vice status: "By your fancy talk you'll never make me go into debt. 'Owe nothing,' says the Holy Apostle, 'save love and mutual affection.'" Pantagruel's reference is to Romans 13.8,⁴¹ an important response to Panurge's argument because it addresses his particular strategy of collapsing economic debt with a broader notion of debt as duty and love.⁴² The verse comes as part of St. Paul's careful parsing of civil and divine law: "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (Romans 13.7-8). Armed with such a verse, Pantagruel can disentangle the paradox that would make economic debt and the *caritas* of Christian fellowship all one. Pantagruel rebukes Panurge with what we can take for an orthodox view of debt. Contrary to the sympathetic debtor Panurge presented himself to be, Pantagruel's debtor is a "boastful blusterer and bothersome borrower" who would be welcomed to any town as the plague, and like Erasmus in the *Adagia*, he reminds us of the Persian tradition that "the second vice was lying, and the first was being in debts. For debts and lies are ordinarily allied together" (274). The reader of the *Tiers Livre*, then, is left with the instruction that Panurge's praise of debts has been an appealing lie.

There is no such corrective framing in Cornwallis's paradox, however, and no dialectic between speakers with varying degrees of moral authority to disentangle the vice from the virtue.

⁴¹ The verse is also central to Henry Wilkinson's treatise *The Debt Book: or, A treatise upon Romans 13. ver. 8 Wherein is handled: the ciuill debt of money or goods, and vnder it the mixt debt, as occasion is offered. Also, the sacred debt of loue*, (London, 1625), which aims to distinguish civil debts, which should be paid, from the debt of love which he describes as "a Debt never fully paid, but always to be yielded and always due" (2).

⁴² Furthermore, Anne Lake Prescott observes that Paul uses the Greek term *panourgia* to mean "injurious craftiness (Eph. 4:14), subtlety (2 Cor. 11:3), cunning (I Cor. 3:19)" in *Imagining Rabelais in Renaissance England* (New Haven & London, 1998), p. 86.

Rather, Cornwallis's borrowings from Panurge serve as the moralistic foundation of his paradox. And so what might seem a simple case of literary imitation (or borrowing) proves to be a document of rhetorical and moral transvaluation, shaped by the immediate cultural context of early modern England's debt problem. Cornwallis's paradox adapts several of Panurge's talking points to the contemporary context of debt in England, most particularly his description of "the little world" of man's indebted body and his depiction of what I will call the creditor-obliged trope. Examining these adaptations demonstrates how the later English paradox spins Rabelais's rhetorical play into an argument responding to the currency of its topic.

Cornwallis follows his description of the Lord whose power derives from what he lends, with the supporting evidence of man's indebted body:

Let him but looke into himselfe, and see how his constitutive parts are debtors each to other, the soule doth quicken and give life to the body, the body like an *Automaton*, doth move and carry itself and the soule, Survey him in his parts, the eye seeth for the foote, the foote standeth for the hand, the hand toucheth for the mouth, the mouth tasteth for the stomacke, the stomacke eateth for the whole body the body repayeth backe againe that nutriment which it hath received, to al the parts, discharging the retriments by the *Port-Esquiline*; and all this in so comely an order, and by a Law so certain, and in so due a time, as if Nature had rather man should not have been at all, then not to be a debtor in every part of him; which hath made me resolve that to whomsoever I meane to bee a friend, I will strive to be in his debt. (par. 2)

Variations on Aesop's Fable of the Belly such as this one were commonplace in the period.

They provide a model of the body politic that naturalizes hierarchy and degree while emphasizing social cohesion and cooperation. As a model that makes debt the reason for social order, the paradigm is a sort of rhetorical antidote to contemporary associations of debt with social discord and mobility. The debt relations this paradigm is intended to revise are those which the law has rendered all too one-sided in the creditor's favor. With this model, Cornwallis replaces the contemporary debtor's enthrallment with the mutuality and cooperation of reciprocal debt relations. The paradigm of the body invokes social strata. The reciprocal debt relations

Cornwallis idealizes here, like his earlier depiction of noblesse oblige, are achieved when the money certain debtors might owe their tailors is weighed in the balance against their nobility and favor. This class-based argument is not present in Panurge's praise and should be read as Cornwallis's original contribution to the paradox.

We can find examples elsewhere of this same paradigm being employed to make earnest arguments in favor of the debtor's plight in early modern England. For instance, a 1622 petition to King James and Parliament authored by imprisoned debtors looking for intervention and relief evokes their place within the body politic as one of many reasons why imprisonment for debt is unjust:

For the body of every subject belongeth to the King and every subject is a member or single part of the body of the Common-wealth. Now to take the body of the Kings subject, and a member of the Common-wealth, and to cast him into prison for Debt, where he must lye rusting and rotting . . is no other then to strip and rob the King and Commonwealth of their limbes, and members.

While debt itself is not explicitly referenced here as the bond between the King and his subjects, the anonymous author(s) of this petition attempt to weight the one-sided debts owed to their creditors against those reciprocal obligations that bind them to King and Commonwealth.

The body politic paradigm figures prominently in Panurge's praise. When describing what a world without debts would be like, Panurge insists that in "the other, little world, which is man . . . you'll find a terrible jinglejangle," for the parts will no longer work together: "The head will not want to lend the sight of its eyes to guide the feet and hands; the feet will not deign to carry the head. . ." (and so on). "In sum, in this disrupted world, owing nothing, lending nothing, borrowing nothing, you will see an even more pernicious conspiracy than Aesop represented in his fable. And it will perish beyond a doubt" (Rabelais 270). Panurge's description of the body *out of debt* depicts social revolt, chaos, and death. He counters this description, however, with

that of “a different world in which everyone lends, everyone owes, all are debtors, all are lenders” (271). Here, man is in perfect order, with “all his members lending, borrowing, owing, that is to say in his natural state. For Nature created man only to lend and borrow. No greater is the harmony of the heavens than will be that of his polity” (271-2). The indebted body is in-sync with a harmonious universe and state. Where Cornwallis’s adaptation seems to idealize quite real and long-standing class divisions, Panurge’s depiction is more utopian in nature. Perhaps this is because, as M.A. Screech has suggested, the Praise of Debts is Panurge’s misapplication of Ficino’s Commentary on Plato’s *Symposium*.⁴³ Panurge replaces love with debt as the force that holds the cosmos together, maintains the soul in the body and leads to the perpetuation of humankind. In the shared task of producing blood, the body exemplifies the perfectly ordered and cooperative economy: “In this formation are all the members in their proper function; and their hierarchy is such that without stopping one borrows from the other, one to the other is debtor” (272).⁴⁴ Panurge compares the process to the Alchemist’s transmutation, a proper analogy as well for the exercise of mock praise (and one picked up by Cornwallis elsewhere).

Cornwallis’s abbreviated iteration clearly echoes Panurge’s formulation of the paradigm, particularly in their shared conclusion that Nature intended men to be nothing if not borrowers and lenders. Furthermore, Cornwallis embraces Panurge’s view of debt as a social cohesive and an opportunity for goodwill. For Panurge the virtues and transactions exemplified by the indebted body point to the social bond of marriage while they lead Cornwallis instead to that of friendship. Both, however, find in the indebted body a model that makes debt essential to good social relations. Panurge proclaims, “I give myself to Saint Babolin the good saint if all my life

⁴³ Screech, 225-226.

⁴⁴ Braudel notes that money metaphorized as “the blood of the social body” was “a commonplace image well before [Gabriel] Harvey’s discovery” in 1628, in *The Structures of Everyday Life*, I, 439.

I've not considered debts to be a sort of connecting link between Heaven and earth, a unique interrelationship of the human race—I mean without which all humans would soon perish—peradventure to be that great soul of the universe, which, according to the Academics, gives life to all things” (Rabelais 268-9). While humorous in its hyperbole, this notion of debt as a “connecting link” between individuals may well have seemed feasible to a reader in early modern England where, as Muldrew argues, “[t]he market was something which linked strangers through hundreds of thousands of different transactions in increasingly lengthy chains of obligation.”⁴⁵ Indeed, a 1622 debtors’ petition makes an argument similar to the one Cornwallis borrows from Panurge: “free borrowing and lending would cause and increase charity and Christian amity amongst men, and knit them together in stronger bonds of love, society, and friendship whereas this lending for gaine, shuts up the hand of all love, friendship, and charity among men.”⁴⁶ Cornwallis wrote his paradox in a context in which most individuals were, for better or worse, knit together by the bonds of debt and credit, rendering Panurge’s hyperbolic claim apt if idealized.

Cornwallis departs from Panurge when it comes to the ideal behavior a world connected by debt requires. For Panurge, debt is above all an opportunity for charity: “Honest to God, won’t that be the age of gold, the reign of Saturn, the model of the Olympian regions in which all other virtues give way. Charity alone reigns, governs, dominates, triumphs?” (Rabelais 271). Panurge envisions a world in which charity begets charity, with payment always occurring forward (as figured by reproduction in the body). This utopian vision and language is adopted by

⁴⁵ Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 10.

⁴⁶ *A Petition to the Kings Most Excellent Majestie A Petition to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, the Lords Spirituall and Temporall, and Commons of the Parliament now assembled, Wherein is declared the mischiefes and inconveniences, arising to the King and Common-wealth, by the Imprisoning of mens bodies for Debt* (London, 1622), 37-8

Cornwallis, with one telling alteration. He writes, “Now if every man would render and repay in full waight, that which by due debt he oweth and hath borrowed from others, *Saturnes* golden age would returne againe” (Cornwallis, par. 7). For Cornwallis, repayment is the ideal which stands in sharp contrast to Parnurge, for whom repayment means cutting himself off from the goodwill of the community since standing debts are the ties that bind. Once Pantagruel clears him of his debts, he complains: “from now on not a fart will be born in all Salmagundi that won’t get sent back to my nose. All the farting farters in the world say: ‘That for the quit!’ My life will soon end, I foresee it. And I’ll die all pickled in farts . . . That’s why I would like to ask you to leave me some hundred-odd debts” (Rabelais 275). But Cornwallis strives to be in his friend’s debt in order that he may repay him – a pretty orthodox attitude, certainly by comparison to Panurge’s. And yet, Cornwallis importantly frames repayment not as a contractual obligation or legal requirement, but as gift-giving between friends. As he explains,

for to him that doeth mee a good turne, I am bound to returne him the greatest pleasure; which I can no way do, but by being in his debt: for what contentment will it be unto him, when I shall repay him his owne again? The Alchymists, who promise to themselves to turne Tin into silver, and Copper into gold, how will they bee transported out of themselves with joy, if they should but see a happy issue of their attempt? How much more a Creditor, when hee shall recover a desperate debt? It is like the joy of a Father that receives his lost Child. (Cornwallis par. 2)

Here Cornwallis suggests that because debt delinquency is widespread, repayment is not expected. Debt then presents an opportunity for gift-giving. A debt repaid exceeds the value of the loan, in the way that gold exceeds copper, not because of interest, but because repayment is unexpected. The loan is considered lost, like a prodigal son, so its value is the greater when it is unexpectedly and joyfully recovered. While Cornwallis’s emphasis on repayment seems orthodox, the suggestion that repayment should be voluntary rather than coerced leaves room for

subversion. As we will see, Cornwallis's paradox insists that not *all* creditors deserve the gift of repayment.

Like most early modern individuals, Cornwallis had firsthand experience with debt. P.B. Whitt observes that when Cornwallis married in 1595, his settlement included the Manor of Grimston Hall, Marston Manor, the Manors of Haspley and Newbourne, and the advowson of the church at Newbourne; that is, four manors and a vicarage. According to Whitt, "[l]ess than two years later, the property had to be sold to defray William's debts."⁴⁷ Also like many of his contemporaries, Cornwallis's creditors included family and friends. Whitt calls attention to letters written by Cornwallis to his kin, Lady Withipoll and Sir John Hobart, pleading poverty and requesting mercy. In one letter to the latter, Cornwallis excuses his delay in payment, promising, "Shortly will I make good and for ever approve myself."⁴⁸ In a second, he expresses his need as a borrower in language bordering on desperation: "Yet behold the power of wife and children when their wants (ever the chiefest) come in question . . . Our extremity is greater than I can write, and if we have not some supply I protest before God we fall into the miserablest extremity"⁴⁹ Such debt relations underscore Cornwallis's representation of the Lord made great by what he can lend, as well as his framing of borrowing and lending as gift exchange between friends. Indeed, yet another letter from Cornwallis to Hobart, cited by Bennett, indicates that Cornwallis made a gift of his paradoxes to this kinsman and creditor:

for my Paradoxes, beleve me, had I thowght they/ shoulde have bine knowen for myne, I woulde thoug[h]/ not in them, yet in keeping them secreatt have sh[ew]/ed some littill discretion: [. . .] & the inteant whearfore I seant them was one[ly]/ to Paralell Christmas

⁴⁷ P.B. Whitt, "New Light on Sir William Cornwallis, the Essayist," *The Review of English Studies* Vol. 8, No. 3, (1932), 158-159.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Whitt, "New Light on Sir William Cornwallis," 162.

⁴⁹ Quoted in *Ibid*, 162. Whitt explains, "as neither letter is dated, I am unable to place them in their correct sequence" (161). Whitt cites the letters as follows: Tanner MSS. CCLXXXV, f. 8 and CCLXXXVI, f. 138.

games, or some such sportes/ whervnto that tyme is Commonly much addickt, [yet] it/ pleaseth you to lyke them, but I thinke rathir me, thoug[h]/ neythir the love that is cast away eythir vppon them or/ me, is love but charity; rather an almes, then the wort[h]/ retornead; you desire them? rathir to obay you, then please/ my sealf I have seant you this week two, if your/ letters will betray you soe much to desier any more,/ 2 weekly I will poyson you w[th]all.⁵⁰

Cornwallis makes light of his paradoxes as trivial and unworthy recreation, a common prefatory trope among paradoxists; but here their worth is placed in relation to that which Cornwallis seeks to return, what he refers to as Hobart's "charity" or "almes"—almost certainly a loan which Cornwallis is otherwise unable to repay at present. Cornwallis's promise to send his kinsman and creditor paradoxes weekly, so long as he desires, suggests that with this letter and his paradoxes, Cornwallis is attempting to manage his debt in terms of gift exchange. This very paradox, "That it is Good to be in Debt," could well have been circulated in such an exchange.

Cornwallis also adapts Panurge's rendering of the creditor-obliged trope, in which the creditor's interest in being repaid ironically places him in fawning service to his debtor. The formulation is opposite to that of Cornwallis's Lord whose lending makes him "the greater Lord over others." Significantly, in this example, rather than being empowered, the creditor is enthralled because his lending is motivated by self-interest rather than goodwill. Panurge expresses the trope as follows: "Do you always owe something to someone? By him will God be continually implored to give you a good, long, and happy life, fearing to lose his debt; always will he speak well of you in all companies, always will acquire for you new creditors, so that by means of them you may make payment, and with other men's earth fill his ditch" (Rabelais 267). Conventional wisdom, as we might expect, held the debtor to be the subservient party. Henry

⁵⁰ Quoted in Bennett, "Four Paradoxes," 220. Bennett dates the letter as follows: "The letter is dated February 4. It certainly was not written later than February, 1603, and, on the basis of an allusion it contains to the wreck of his political hopes, I am inclined to assign it to February, 1601(new style), or even to the preceding February" (219). The letter is cited as Tanner MS. 283, f. 204.

Wilkinson's 1625 treatise *The Debt Book* articulates this view: "[...] in many cases it is a servile thing to be indebted: and therefore when the Lord will set down an underling, hee describes him by being a borrower, and not a lender."⁵¹ The creditor-obliged trope overturns this commonplace so that it is the creditor who becomes servile.

Erasmus's 1529 colloquy "The Ignoble Knight, or Faked Nobility" (*Ementita nobilitas*) provides an earlier example of this trope. The colloquy satirizes pretending gentlemen and vices associated with the nobility, debt primary among them.⁵² When the pretending gentleman, Harpalus ("grasping"), expresses fears that his creditors will press him, a satirical Nestor reassures him:

On the contrary, there's no easier path to a kingdom than to be in debt to as many people as possible. [. . .] In the first place, the creditor treats you with respect, as if obliged for some great favour; and he's fearful of providing an occasion that may cause him to lose his money. No servants so fawning as a debtor's creditors. If you pay them something once in a while, they're more pleased than if you gave them a present.⁵³

Here, the creditor's enthrallment is the result of the prodigal debtor's scheming, but we can see this blame shift across Rabelais's and Cornwallis's paradoxes.

Panurge's iteration of the trope, coming as it does from the mouth of the benefitting debtor, shifts this deceitful rhetoric and behavior inherent in the trope, onto the creditor:

Will you believe how happy I am when every morning I see around me these creditors, so humble, so serviceable, and full of scrapes and bows? And when I note that when I show one of them a more open face and better greeting than to the others, the rascal thinks that he will get his quittance first, thinks he will have his day first, and supposes that my smile

⁵¹ Wilkinson, Henry. *The debt book: or, A treatise vpon Romans 13. ver. 8 Wherein is handled: the ciuill debt of money or goods, and vnder it the mixt debt, as occasion is offered. Also, the sacred debt of loue.* (London, 1625), 5.

⁵² Nestor's list of noble vices provides a sense of some of the vices linked to debt: "Unless you're a good dicer, a famous card player, an infamous whoremonger, a heavy drinker, a reckless spendthrift, a wastrel and heavily in debt, decorated with the French pox besides, hardly anyone will believe you're a knight" (*Colloquies*, 428-29). Many of these vices were common subjects of mock encomia.

⁵³ *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, translated by Craig R. Thompson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 429.

is ready money? It makes me think I'm still playing God in the Saumar passion play surrounded by His angel and cherubim. They are my candidates, my parasites, my glad-handers, my good-day-sayers, my perpetual speechmakers. (Rabelais 268)

Here, the “rascal” creditor’s servitude is a self-interested performance, which suits Panurge just fine. This representation of the deceitful creditor, paired with the satisfaction of social topsyturvy, lends the debtor sympathy, particularly in the case of the infinitely likeable Panurge.

Panurge explains how the creditor-obliged relationship works by turning to the example of the druids of Gaul whose servants were burned alive with their deceased masters:

Weren’t they careful to treat and serve them well, for together they could live, at least, until death? Believe me, in even more fervent devotion your creditors will pray God that you live, will fear that you may die, the more so because they love the sleeve more than the arm, the penny more than life; witness the usurers of Landerousse not long ago, who hanged themselves when they saw the price of wheat and wines go down and good weather return. (267-8)

Panurge’s examples suggest that self-interest can become shared interest, when the master’s and servant’s interests align. But when profits are threatened, the creditors (like those usurers of Landerousse) love “the penny more than life.” The creditor, then, has become the scapegoat for debt’s vice associations.

Cornwallis’s adaptation of the trope is very close to Rabelais’s, even picking up the example of the French usurers:

Againe, he that is in debt, hath this great priviledge above other men, that his Creditors powre out hearty prayers for him, they wish that hee may live, and thrive and prosper, and grow rich, and all for their owne advantage. They seeme to be carefull for their debtors, that they may not lose their principall with the interest, for their money is their life, witnesse those Usurers of France, who, when they heard that the price of Corne was fallen, went and hanged themselves for grieve. (par. 3).

Already Cornwallis is calling attention here to the creditor’s self interest – their actions are “for their owne advantage” – and their deceitfulness – “they *seem* to be carefull for their debtors.”

But in the legal climate of early modern England, only the debtor experiences the enthrallment of

debt. In Cornwallis's paradox, the creditor-obliged trope is a tool for the predatory creditor rather than the prodigal debtor:

What a command doth the debtor gaine over his Creditors? He becommeth in a manner their Landlord, to whom they cap, crouch, and kneele, as if they did owe him all suits and services, and are as ambitious of their favours, as they who in Rome did canvass the people for their voices to attaine the greatest offices: but here is their cunning: *Laudant ut Ledant*, they praise them, that they may prey upon them. And therefore, you brave gallants and spendthrifts, who find by your wofull experience, that no whip gives a shrewder lash then the label of a Bond or Obligation, with a *Noverint universi skinner* and *Lacy*.⁵⁴ Whensoever you fall into the Mercers' books, never take care, or make conscience of paying your debts, for by that meanes you shall keepe your Creditor in awe, and shall have him wonderfull courteous and officious, and obsequious towards you, and a great mint-master of faire words. (Cornwallis, par. 4)

Here the creditor's seeming servility is all part of his "cunning." The creditor pretends that the power dynamic is flipped in favor of the debtor, only so that he might prey on him with his "Bond or Obligation," legal contracts of debt enforceable by the threat of distraint, in which debts are redeemed from the sale of the debtor's goods and property, or imprisonment. What appears to be the debtor's empowerment is really his exploitation. The narrator's sympathy here aligns with the "brave gallants and spendthrifts" he addresses; what we know of Cornwallis's biography and finances suggests he could have identified with such stock debtor types. Cornwallis contradicts his earlier emphasis on repayment by advising these debtors to keep their creditors in their place by *not* paying. The shift in message can be accounted for by the type of creditor depicted here: no longer the Lord lending out of beneficence, but the Mercer, motivated by profit and willing to exact penalty with an action of debt and imprisonment. Such creditors, it seems, do not deserve the gift of repayment. The attitude towards debt put forward by the paradox seems underwritten by a resistance to the way debt law empowered creditors, presumably of any class, against their debtors – even young clever gentlemen.

⁵⁴ "Be it known to all"—a common legal formulation.

Cornwallis's representations of debtor and creditor here conjure debt's comedic emplotments which, as we will see in chapter four, vilify hard-hearted creditors even as they encourage a jovial tolerance and sympathy for prodigal vice-debtor types. Widespread popular experience with debt as a social problem coincides with a proliferation of these vice-debtor types (prodigals, gallants, and spendthrifts), particularly in London comedies.⁵⁵ Many of these debtors are rendered sympathetic—even downright likable, in some cases—by comedic plot elements (*i.e.* father/son, master/servant topsy-turvy; love sub-plots; exhibitions of improvisational wit), by the villainy of their creditors, and often, by some embodiment of nostalgia or a vexed moral authority.⁵⁶ Cornwallis evokes such comedic treatments of debt when dealing most directly with economic debt. In doing so, his paradox benefits from a ready-made sympathetic angle on a contentious issue. Cornwallis arms his paradox, then, with elements of popular sympathy and laughter, as well as the moral philosophizing he borrows from Panurge.

The latter half of the paradox, which moves away from the argumentation of Panurge's Praise, addresses economic debt more directly. Cornwallis acknowledges debt as a vice with legal repercussions, but also as a vice that has a history of leniency and forgiveness:

With what dearnesse have both gods and good men countenanced and graced debtors? To whom *Diana* the great goddess of *Ephesus*, granted her Temple for a Sanctuarie, to keepe them out of *Bagwelle: Pigeon-houses*. Or if they were caught, *Solon* by a solemne Law inacted, would not have their bodies to be fettered or manacled amongst malefactors, but that they should enjoy their liberty throughout all the Parkes and Purlues of the prison. (par. 8)

⁵⁵ For a thorough discussion of debtors and debtors' prisons in London comedies, see Howard, "Credit, Incarceration, and Performance," *Theater of a City*, 68-113.

⁵⁶ There are, of course, notable exceptions to the sympathetic, comedic debtor. An early example is Jonson's Fastidious Brisk of *Every Man Out of His Humor* (1600), a pretending gentleman who engages in excessive conspicuous consumption and ends the play bound for debtors' prison. Macilente admonishes him with, "Now, monsieur, you see the plague that treads o' the heels of your foppery" (5.3.567-9). His character, based in part on Harpalus from Erasmus's colloquy "The Ignoble Knight" which satirizes pretensions to nobility, is farcical and not particularly sympathetic. Though even Brisk gains some sympathy from the extreme measures of his creditor, Delirio. Fallace warns Brisk: "Lord deliver you!—you are in for one-half a score year! He kept a poor man in Ludgate once twelve year for sixteen shillings" (5.3.496-8).

With these examples, Cornwallis responds to the most controversial aspect of economic debt: the imprisonment of debtors. Here Cornwallis offers precedence for less severe consequences or some measure of relief to imprisoned debtors, social reforms often called for in complaint literature.⁵⁷ Cornwallis imagines debtors among a typical cast of early modern prisoners – “varlet, roarers, and stilettostabbers,” the “Lollard of trunck-hosed famulists and separatists,” and the “expenfull wasters, gamesters and unthrifty debtors” (par. 8) – but places special emphasis on one particular group he imagines there:

And lastly, the Lumbards, Usurers, and Scriveners, who are the Bedles of Beggars, and are accounted the Tetters upon the body politike of the Common-weale, who turne the Calends and new Moones, and the Festivall days of quarter-gaudies into the Octanes of disaster and Doomes-day reckonings, when any of these come to Heaven, there is a wonderment amongst the Angels, and they cry out [...] *here is a new kind of fruit start up.* (par. 9)

The creditors depicted here are not those magnanimous Lords for whom borrowing and lending are expressions of friendship, but rather the Mercer who preys on gallants and spendthrifts with the lash of the bond. For this “new kind of fruit start up,” the self-interested creditor (with special emphasis here on his lack of class deference), there is ultimately no redemption, as even the angels are offended by his business. Meanwhile the imprisoned debtor finds that “*Debts* wants and indignecy” serve as a scourge to vice (par. 8). The weight of debt’s long-standing vice associations have been passed onto the creditor, while the debtor becomes the figure for the Christian sinner bound by his duties to God, country, and fellow man:

⁵⁷ See, for instance, Anonymous, *To the Kings most excellent Maiestie, the honorable lords, knights and burgesses assembled in Parliament the humble petition of your maiesties most miserable (yet most loyall subiects) the prisoners for debt in the Kings Bench* (London, 1621); Anonymous, *A petition to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, the Lords spirituall and temporall, and Commons of the Parliament now assembeld. VVherein is declared the mischiefs and inconueniences, arising to the King and Common-wealth, by the imprisoning of mens bodies for debt*, (London, 1622); and Samuel Cottesford, *A very soueraigne oyle to restore debtors; being rightly and seasonably vsed Extracted out of that most tried and quintessensed oyle, by the prophet Elisha. By vertue whereof the vviddovv indebted, (mentioned in the second booke of the Kings) was restored out of debt, and her children released of the bondage whereof they were in danger*, (London, 1622).

For the Al-te-mael, and foote of the reckoning, this is the *summa summarum*: *Debemur morti nos nostrag*. So that whilst I live, I must resolve to live in debt, indebt to God, for my being; in debt to CHRIST, for my well-being; in debt to Gods sanctifying Spirit, for my new-being: And I will ever be ready to pawne my life for my Countries liberty, I will owe obedience to my Parents, Faith and Loyaltie to my Prince: And when I shall pay my great debt unto Nature, I will render my spirit into the hands of God; bequeath my body to be desposed in the lap and bosome of the earth, and cry *Domine, Dimitte debita mea*. (par. 12)

Cornwallis's paradox concludes then by returning to the notion that to be in debt is to honor the spiritual and affective bonds that constitute Christian society. As we have seen, the framework for this argument is borrowed in large part from "Panurge's Praise of Debts." Cornwallis's paradox has used debt's paradoxical rhetorical tradition as a means of redeeming debt's social and moral value.

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We do not know in what form Cornwallis might have encountered "Panurge's Praise of Debts." It is unlikely he read Rabelais directly. We know by his own admission that he did not possess the French to read Montaigne in the original, so we can certainly draw the same conclusion regarding Rabelais who was famous for his difficult Greekified French.<sup>58</sup> There are no known English translations of the *Tiers Livre* or Panurge's Praise at the date of the paradox's composition;<sup>59</sup> Thomas Urquhart's translation would not come until 1693. Cornwallis drew on

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<sup>58</sup> Cornwallis, *Essayes* (London, 1600), Essay 12, "Of Censuring": "For profitable Recreation, that Noble French Knight, the Lord *de Montaigne* is most excellent, whom though I haue not bene so much beholding to the French as to see in his Originall, yet diuers of his peeces I haue seene translated: they that vnderstand both languages say very well done, and I am able to say (if you will take the word of Ignorance) translated into a stile, admitting as fewe Idle words as our language wil endure: It is well fitted in this newe garment, and *Montaigne* speaks now good English" (H4).

<sup>59</sup> Prescott confesses her study offers "little evidence to show just how the English acquired or saw copies of Rabelais's works or other books linked with him." She writes that though Rabelais rarely appears in private libraries in the period, "many did read him, and yet others might have enjoyed him had they been able to decode his learned, playful, punning, sprawling, allusive, and demanding French. Perhaps some with less than optimal French heard about an episode from a friend, made out a few jokes, read a chapter or two with a tutor, or even took a look at some now lost partial translation being from hand to hand in London's sophisticated circles" (*Imagining Rabelais*, xiv). Among the English writers Prescott identifies as referencing, appropriating, or in some way alluding to Panurge

Spanish, Italian, and Latin texts, so it is possible he drew from a translation or adaptation in these languages.<sup>60</sup> An extant 1580's Neo-Latin paradox of debt by the exiled Englishman, and Catholic priest, Robert Turner is a possible transmission text. Turner's paradox, *Encomium debiti*, closely adapts Rabelais's mock encomium even as it puts forward an earnest defense of debt's value within a Christian life, acknowledging that "debt must be both a necessary and a desirable fact of life."<sup>61</sup> Turner's adaptation, then, reads much like Cornwallis's. Whether or not Cornwallis knew Turner's paradox, the circulation of another earnest adaptation of Rabelais's mock encomium further suggests that Cornwallis's exercise was part of a larger cultural tendency to read or re-conceive the vice of debt in terms of its virtuous connotations.

For a reader predisposed to be sympathetic, Rabelais's mock encomium could support an earnest reading. Modeled on Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, the paradox is a highly ambiguous mock encomium. With its sophisticated argumentation and emphasis on charitable relations, Panurge's Praise carries some moral weight until Pantagruel condemns it; but this comes only after three uninterrupted chapters of Panurge's persuasive sophistry. We have already seen how paradoxes often escaped the author's intention. Panurge's Praise is a text that could easily go the way of Gorgias's Praise of Helen. Though a fool, Panurge is a skilled rhetorician; the paradox he puts forward is artfully composed, and as Erasmus's own wise fool reminds us, "*Often a foolish man*

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(though not necessarily Rabelais's Panurge), are Thomas Heywood, Ben Jonson, Thomas Tomkis, Richard Brathwait, John Day, Alexander Craig, and John Donne, Cornwallis's friend (pp. 86-102).

<sup>60</sup> Bennett notes that Cornwallis's "The Praise of the French Pockes" is "a free translation of 'Que trata de las excelencias de las bubas' from 'Carnestolendas de Castilla' by Gaspar Lucas Hidalgo and 'The Prayse of Nothing' is a translation of 'Nihil' by Jean Passerat. Furthermore, Bennett suggests he probably drew directly on Lando in the Italian for portion of "That miserie is true Felicity" (220-22).

<sup>61</sup> Tomarken, *Smile of Truth*, 57. Turner's "The Praise of debt; or, Paradox, that it is better to owe than not to owe" was written in the 1580s and published posthumously in 1602 and again in Caspar Dornavius' *Amphitheatrum sapientie* in 1619. Turner's adaptation of Panurge's Praise of debts is also noted by Prescott (*Imagining Rabelais*, 88) and Camilla Nilles, "The Economy of Owing: Rabelais's Praise of Debts," *Etudes De Lettres*, Vol. 2 (April-June, 1984), 73-88.



*says something to the point.*”<sup>62</sup> The argument Panurge asserts reconciles debt’s paradox of vice and virtue by depicting debt as a bond between individuals that creates community by transmuting self-interest to cooperation.<sup>63</sup> In the context of early modern England’s debt problem—in which the contentious interests of creditors and debtors led to widespread defaults, litigation, and imprisonment—it is possible that this paradox not only signified as more earnest than mocking, but that it seemed a viable new theory with which to unmake the orthodoxy of debt as vice.

William Cornwallis’s paradox “That it is Good to be in Debt” adapted Panurge’s argument and, once in print, circulated these tropes and rhetorical strategies as part of a contemporary discourse of debt. As we have begun to see a hint of in this essay, and as we will continue to see throughout the chapters that follow, echoes of the rhetorical formulations of Panurge and Cornwallis can be found in the complaint literature surrounding debt in the period, suggesting that strategies belonging to paradox begin to be put forward in earnest arguments concerning the issue. With this essay, I have attempted to draw attention to Cornwallis’s participation in this rhetorical and social turn.

It is worth noting here that Cornwallis’s contribution did not end with the last edition of his paradoxes. Twenty-seven years later, in 1644, Thomas Jordan, an actor, poet and playwright who would come to be known as the ‘City Poet’ for his many Lord Mayor’s city pageants, became Cornwallis’s debtor when he published a pamphlet entitled “The Debtor’s Apologie, or, A Quaint Paradox Proving that it is good to be in Debt, and (in this Age) may be usefull for all

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<sup>62</sup> Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, translated by Clarence H. Miller (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 138.

<sup>63</sup> As Albert O. Hirschman has shown, there is a significant history of thought in the seventeenth century that imagines how the passions and vices of individuals might be harnessed to work towards the common good. See *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton, 1977).

Men.” The essay that follows is word-for-word Cornwallis’s “That it is Good to be in Debt,” re-framed by a new title page as a defense of debt and debtors, subjects made good and useful, Jordan suggests, “*in this Age.*”

Rosalie Colie has shown that “[a]gain and again, paradoxes evidently trivial. . . turn out to be deeply moral.”<sup>64</sup> W.V. Quinn observes, “[m]ore than once in history the discovery of paradox has been the occasion for major reconstruction at the foundations of thought.”<sup>65</sup> Quinn has in mind theoretical paradoxes, but rhetorical paradoxes can also restructure thought, recasting the orthodox positions of their topics, translating vices into virtues. Cornwallis’s “That it is Good to be in Debt” uses debt’s paradoxical tradition to address the problem of debt in early modern England, insisting that the vice of economic debt must be met with the virtues contained within a broader conception of debt as love.

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<sup>64</sup> Colie, *Paradoxia*, 11.

<sup>65</sup> W.V. Quinn, *The Ways of Paradox, and other essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), 3-4.

CHAPTER TWO  
**“None Me Credit Dare”: Isabella Whitney’s Sympathetic Debtor**

Isabella Whitney’s second volume of verse, *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573), is uniquely concerned with the credit problems attending a single woman in the city. Throughout the volume Whitney adopts a persona who identifies with a variety of difficult circumstances. Whitney’s speaker is an out of work domestic servant living alone, cut off from friends and family, plagued by insolvency and debt. Each of these circumstances presents a strike against the speaker’s credit, both in terms of her reputation and the extensions of trust that purchase the daily necessities needed for life in London. Whitney uses her persona’s underlying narrative of hardship to explore how an early modern woman’s writing might intervene in her own credit crisis.

Across the volume’s three versified forms – sentences, epistles, and the mock will and testament – Whitney’s speaker, “Is. W.,” addresses an array of strikes against her credit by showing herself to be engaged in networks of well-managed affective debt relations, relations that often have an economic function but are primarily defined by the reciprocal exchanges of affection. Is. W. repairs her credit by countering the *bad* debts associated with her circumstances – debts suggestive of scandal and criminality – with representations of *good* debt – debts that link her to the households and protection of family, friends, and potential patrons. In doing so, Whitney’s scandal-ridden persona recasts herself as a sympathetic debtor.

In the volume’s first section, the speaker’s intimacy and affection for Hugh Plat’s *The Floures of Philosophie* (1572) answers the accusation of plagiarism raised by *A Sweet Nosgay*’s

appropriation of the work. In the second, the speaker's personal letters to friends and family air grievances concerning unjust slanders and showcase her affective ties and exchanges. In the third, the mock will and testament allows the speaker to deny a rumor connecting her to debtors' prison and to condemn London's cruel commercial culture, even as she proclaims her love for the city. Across the volume Whitney's speaker articulates a model for credibility based on affection and familiarity – here referred to as affectionate accreditation – rather than economic solvency. This alternative model of accreditation answers the social and economic insecurities of the credit market – figured at their worst by the potentially catastrophic event of debt default – with debt's alternative value as an emotional and moral bond. This rhetorical strategy reveals one way in which the early modern discourse of debt – at once economic, legal affective, and moral – could be turned on itself as a means for managing personal credit crises.

Such a reading also carries implications for Isabella Whitney's identity as a woman writing for publication, indeed, as the first English woman to publish a work of non-sacred verse. We know that early modern professional authorship was riddled with anxieties over credibility, particularly as early as the 1570's. As we might expect, Whitney's identity as a female author presented challenges beyond those of her male counterparts. Beyond simply being a masculinized role, authorship's goal of circulation, particularly throughout the marketplace by way of publication, carried scandalous implications for women.<sup>1</sup> Much of the criticism concerning her two volumes has focused on the texts' strategies for constructing legitimate

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<sup>1</sup> See Elaine Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: women writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), especially pp. xiii-xxiv; Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: women's love lyric in Europe, 1540-1620* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 11-35; and Wendy Wall, "Isabella Whitney and the Female Legacy." *English Literary History*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Spring, 1991): 35-62. Wall reminds us that "the female writer could become a 'fallen' woman in a double sense: branded as a harlot or a member of the un-elite" ("Female Legacy," 36).

authorship.<sup>2</sup> Is. W.'s identification as a socially and economically vulnerable single woman enables Whitney to experiment with creative rhetorical strategies for constructing her own credibility as a female professional author.

Beyond its implications for Whitney's authorship, this reading allows us to recognize *A Sweet Nosgay's* affinities with later narratives composed in whole or part by early modern women towards the end of intervening in personal crises concerning reputation. In reading Whitney's volume alongside the period's rise in defamation testimonies, and with an eye toward later defenses against slander published by women, I suggest that *A Sweet Nosgay's* early experimental interventions in the credit market provide a literary precedent for this genre and the counter-intuitive notion that early modern women might turn authorship and publication to their credit.

## I

I use the word "credit" with Craig Muldrew's definition in mind. "More than anything," he writes, "credit was a public means of social communication and circulating judgement about

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<sup>2</sup> Most critics are concerned with problems of authorship, which implicitly include reputation and credibility. Beilin, "Writing Public Poetry: Humanism and the Woman Writer," *Modern Language Quarterly: Journal of Literary History* 51:2 (1990): 249-71, and Jones, *The Currency of Eros* approach this topic through Whitney's reconception of humanist traditions. Wall, "Isabella Whitney and the Female Legacy," reads Whitney as finding authority in a tradition of female legacy and an unconventional deployment of Petrarchan blazon. Wall and Allison Johnson, "The 'Single Lyfe' of Isabella Whitney: Love, Friendship, and the Single Woman Writer," in *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700*, ed. Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere Lopez, and Lorna Hutson (Farnham & Burlington: Ashgate, 2011) both note the work's imitation of manuscript coteries. Johnson has particularly emphasized Whitney's representations of affective connections as a means for mitigating the negative effects of her position as a single woman and a writer in the public sphere. Often paired with this focus on authorship is the identification of particular cultural discourses deployed by Whitney to negotiate the difficulties of her professional writing. Patricia Phillippy, "The Maid's Lawful Liberty: Service, the Household, and 'Mother B' in Isabella Whitney's *A Sweet Nosgay*," *Modern Philology*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (May, 1998): 439-462, and Laurie Ellinghausen, "Literary Property and the Single Woman in Isabella Whitney's *A Sweet Nosgay*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* (Winter 2005): 1-22, both examine Whitney's engagement with discourses of domestic service and itinerancy to manage anxieties around female authorship and publication. Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), looks at Whitney's model of professional authorship by comparing it to that of the Elizabethan Prodigals. Though all of these critics observe the work's concern with poverty and debt, only Hutson and Jill Phillips Ingram, *Idioms of Self-Interest: Credit, Identity, and Property in English Renaissance Literature* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006) offer readings that fully integrate the work's preoccupation with credit and Whitney's poetic project with the early modern credit economy.

the value of other members of communities.”<sup>3</sup> Muldrew calls the circulating language that conveyed this value the “currency of reputation.” Reputation was the measure of one’s creditworthiness, or trustworthiness, and this included social and ethical attributes, such as honesty and character, as well as economic solvency.<sup>4</sup> *A Sweet Nosgay* is a text thematically concerned with this currency. Each of the volume’s sections takes up the matter of malicious tongues, and two of the verse epistles indicate that Is. W. has been the target of such slanderous gossip. In a letter to a friend, “C.B.,” Whitney’s speaker complains of “how some me spite” (D.vi). The friend’s reply warns against despair and reminds her that Christ too was the target of “evell words and other wants.” C.B.’s letter insists that Is. W.’s friends “will not regard thy enemies tong” and offers a personal testimony of her character: “The vertue that hath euer beene,/ within thy tender brest:/ Which I from yeare to yeare, haue seene,/ in all thy deedes exprest:/ Doth me perswade thy enemies lye,/ And in that quarell would I dye” (D.vii).<sup>5</sup> Whitney’s speaker depicts herself as publicly maligned by the tongues of enemies, and offers a defense of her character in the form of a personal letter from a friend.

The content of this malicious talk is never made explicit. The only specific rumor Is. W. addresses comes in the volume’s final section, the mock will and testament. Treating her imminent departure from London as her death, Whitney’s speaker good-humoredly bequeaths the city to itself in a vividly detailed chorography. The will catalogs late sixteenth-century London’s buildings, streets, and shops with their foodstuffs, merchandise, and goods, as well as

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<sup>3</sup>Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: the Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1998), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> All quotations from *A Sweet Nosgay* come from the British Library’s extant 1573 second edition (accessed in hardcopy and digitally via *EEBO*) and from Richard Panofsky’s facsimile of the same edition in *The Floures of Philosophie (1572) by Hugh Plat and A Sweet Nosgay (1573) and The Copy of a Letter (1567) by Isabella Whitney* (Delmar, New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1982). Here and hereafter cited in the text.

the city's various professions and characters. Following this affectionate description of the city's vast commercial culture, a significant stretch of the will turns to remembering the city's prisons and prisoners: "And that the poore, when I am gone,/ have cause for me to pray./ I wyll to prisons portions leave, what though but very small: Yet that they may remember me, occasion be it shall" (C.vi). The turn to prisons, of all possible urban spaces, after the description of the city's commercial culture underscores the mock-testament's focus on the speaker's departure from the city as the end result of a long-drawn-out economic ailment, as signaled by its opening lines: "I whole in body, and in minde,/ but very weake in Purse:/ Doo make, and write my Testament/ for feare it wyll be wurse" (C.iii). Is. W.'s frank and humorous treatment of her poverty aligns her sympathies with the city's criminalized underclass.<sup>6</sup> She leaves portions to the Counter, Newgate, and the Fleete, but concludes by singling out a prison she suspects her audience has reason to associate with herself:

What makes you standers by to smile./ and laugh so in your sleeue:  
 I thinke it is, because that I/ to Ludgate nothing geue.  
 I am not now in case to lye,/ here is no place of iest:  
 I dyd reserue, that for my selfe,/ yf I my health possest.  
 And euer came in credit so/ a debtor for to bee.  
 When dayes of paiment did approach,/ I thither ment to flee.  
 To shroude my selfe amongst the rest,/ that chuse to dye in debt:  
 Rather then any Creditor,/ should money from them get.  
 Yet cause I feele my selfe so weake/ that none mee credit dare:  
 I heere reuoke: and doo it leaue,/ some Banckrupts to his share. (C.vi)

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<sup>6</sup> Jones asserts that Whitney overcomes the obstacles to respectable authorship by producing "unimpeachably chaste" poetry, by writing "about the good woman in the persona of a good woman" (*Currency of Eros*, 36-51). I agree that Whitney is at pains to self-represent as "a good woman" in order to shore up her credibility as an author and, I would add, as an independent agent in the public credit market. However, my reading also reveals the ways in which Whitney's text records the cultural slights and slanders that plague her position as both. I would qualify Jones's assertion then by suggesting that Whitney writes as a good woman but about the various infections threatening her credit as such, an occasion that requires the strategic invoking and negating of unsavory scenarios – imprisonment, prostitution, and theft, for instance. Thus, Whitney's strategies for managing her credit are often – like the choice to publish in the first place – double-edged swords, risky but creative ways of negotiating the cultural interpretations her text is at pains to redress.

Here the speaker imagines that her omission of Ludgate thus far in the catalogue of prisons is creating a stir amongst her audience. They smile and laugh in their sleeves as the list of prisons, combined with the apparently notable lack of this particular one, invokes some public knowledge, a rumor perhaps. Without divulging directly why it is the audience might expect her to leave something to Ludgate in particular, Is. W. adopts a playful and bold confessional tone: “I dyd reserue, that for my selfe.” She confirms a provisional association between herself and the well-known debtors’ prison, but her confession seeks to set the record straight by ultimately dissociating herself from Ludgate and the debt that would have placed her there: “Yet cause I feelee my selfe so weake/ that none mee credit dare: / I heere reuoke: and doo it leaue,/ some Banckrupts to his share.” She laughs off any rumors of her default and imprisonment with the claim that her plan to take refuge in Ludgate was frustrated by her inability to acquire debts in the first place.

Whitney attributes her lack of credit to poor health – “cause I feelee my selfe so weake” – but this continues the mock-testament’s conceit of her poverty as an ailment which begins in its opening lines: “I whole in body, and in minde,/ but very weake in Purse.” Though Is. W. uses health related language to describe the difficulties of her circumstances throughout the work, these first of her last words to London make it clear that the speaker’s ailment is of the purse rather than the body. The simple reason Whitney offers for her persona’s lack of credit, then, is insolvency, the very blight most debtors, or would-be debtors, seek to hide above all.

That Whitney’s speaker is ultimately concerned with managing her credit is evidenced in her efforts throughout the volume to find means that would allow her “to stay on here” and in her self-conscious concern with what will be said of her when she does leave London. Why, then, would Is. W. seemingly undermine her credibility further by calling attention to her insolvency



and her inability to acquire debts? After all, in the early modern credit economy, indebtedness itself could function as a kind of solvency. Since being in debt required having been trusted in the first place, debt could serve as a form of credit, evidence of one's recognized social worth. A debtor's indebtedness could recommend her to yet another creditor. As it became increasingly difficult to know the character of would-be debtors, reputation functioned as an early modern FICA score. If others trusted a debtor, then she must be good for it. Networks of credit for smaller sums tended to work both ways, so most who borrowed also lent. A potential debtor known to be engaged in networks of credit appeared to have a community's trust and the means to back it up. The admission that "none me credit dare" seems an unlikely strategy for addressing rumors spread by malicious tongues.

And yet, for a widely engaged debtor, reputation was a house of cards. Once a debtor became notorious as such, or her inability to keep her day with a creditor led to a suit of action, what once signified as trustworthiness was quickly translated into delinquency. Word of a suit, arrest, or seizure of goods was enough to inspire all of a debtor's creditors to call in their loans at once. It is a commonplace of the period that individuals known to be widely in debt should make a point of being seen in public to avoid rumors that they were staying indoors to avoid arrest. Such a rumor could prove a self-fulfilling prophecy, panicking creditors and, ironically, leading to arrest. Thus, what it meant to be a debtor could change in an instant: trusted, connected and enfranchised one moment; dispossessed, cast aside, and ruined the next.

Because the mock-testament's audience associates Whitney's speaker with the kind of debt that would place her in Ludgate – that is, because she is a scandalous debtor – generating or repairing credibility would mean distancing herself from participation in London's credit market. Is. W. responds to this conundrum with a deft division of debt's economic and affective values.

By confessing her insolvency, Whitney's speaker can avoid the ruin and dispossession that default entails in the realm of public opinion. And by replacing this scandalous debt with representations of various affective debt relations – that is, by recasting herself as a sympathetic debtor – Is. W. can still claim the solvency that comes from the connection and trust implied by participation in these networks.

## II

The credit problems thematized by Whitney's volume extend beyond explicitly economic imperatives. They include Is. W.'s inability to get credit to cover rent and basic necessities; but they also include suspicions about her behavior and character: why she has lost her job, why she keeps indoors, what she is doing in the streets, why she must now leave London, why she chooses to write rather than keep house. The identity and circumstances of Whitney's chosen persona demonstrate the range of credit problems with which a single woman in early modern London might have to contend.

Is. W.'s solitude in London, her lack of attachment to a household, the central social and economic unit in early modern society, are cause enough for her credit problems.<sup>7</sup> A single woman unattached to a household through marriage, kinship, or domestic service was a woman living in suspect and difficult circumstances. Such women were suspected of sexual immorality and often persecuted by civic authorities.<sup>8</sup> Despite the legal autonomy of single women (*femes soles*) "to make contracts, to own and dispose of property, and to sue or be sued in a court of law," there was no accepted independent place for never married women in early modern

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 5, 157-72. See also Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 16; and Richard Grassby, *Kinship and Capitalism: Marriage, Family and Business in the English Speaking World, 1580-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 21.

England as there was for widows.<sup>9</sup> In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice's witty acceptance of the proverbial fate of old maids— leading apes into hell (2.1.32-4)<sup>10</sup> – points to the cultural antipathy for never married women in the period. This attitude is especially visible around their efforts to live and work independently, and thus, to participate in the marketplace as free agents. Notoriety around personal economic problems of the sort Whitney claims for her persona carried with it a host of cultural anxieties. Single women's independent economic activity was often criminalized in the cultural imagination, ranging from rogue participation in trade, to money-lending, bawdry, and the outright prostitution that functioned as a cultural analog for most of women's commercial activities.<sup>11</sup> One of the few acceptable forms of employment was domestic service because this placed single women in a subordinate position under a master within a household. And yet, as a former domestic maidservant, Whitney's persona stirs up anxieties attached to this problematic identity.

Patricia Phillippy and Laurie Ellinghausen have shown the extent to which maidservants and prostitutes were understood as “bound together in monetary and sexual economies.”<sup>12</sup> Discourse surrounding the conduct of domestic maidservants is saturated with fears concerning the unrestrained liberties of these single, migratory women. Though maidservants were attached to households, their attachment could be short term, easily dissolved for a better situation or a marriage, placing these single women both beyond the reach of parental oversight and,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 15 n.2, 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 1381-1444. References are to act, scene, and line, here and hereafter cited in the text.

<sup>11</sup> See Froide, *Never Married*, 27-34 and Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 14-17.

<sup>12</sup> Phillippy, “Maids Lawful Liberty,” 452. See also Ellinghausen, “Literary Property.” Ellinghausen argues that Whitney strategically chooses the persona of a maidservant because the anxieties concerning sexuality and property in discourses around this identity are useful to her own examination of the problems of professional authorship for a single woman. For a thorough examination of early modern women's domestic service, see Paula Humfrey, ed., *The Experience of Domestic Service for Women in Early Modern London* (Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

potentially, beyond their master's authority. Households contained domestic maidservants, then, but presumably could not control them, rendering them an imagined threat to the stability and honor of the household; what was to stop these itinerant and unrestrained young women from sleeping with the master, stealing from the mistress, or bringing dishonor to the house through promiscuity, light behavior, or gossip, when they were free to leave or seek employment elsewhere anytime? Think of *Much Ado*'s maidservant Margaret whose assignation with Borachio in her mistress's garments enabled Don Pedro's plot to slander Hero, or Samuel Pepys's account of his dalliance with his maid, Deb Willet, who was subsequently turned out of the house and barely escaped a slit nose.<sup>13</sup> That Whitney's speaker has lost her position as a maidservant and not yet procured another might easily be interpreted by an early modern audience as the result of misconduct on her part. A shortage of positions and oversupply of young single women migrating to the city for domestic service led to an underclass of unemployed would-be and former maidservants. The fear was that these women would turn to criminalized means for subsistence, which could lead to preemptive arrest simply for being out of service.<sup>14</sup> Classified as the "able-bodied" and "undeserving" poor, unemployed single women were rarely the beneficiaries of poor relief, unlike their widowed counterparts.<sup>15</sup> These

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that Margaret is treated as blameless once the truth comes out (5.1.281-87), and her bawdy interaction with Benedick shortly thereafter indicates an altogether different set of expectations for the maidservant's conduct than for her mistress's in this comedic context (5.2.1-20). This distinction in social status did not exonerate the non-fictional Deb Willet. See Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys, Vol. IX, 1668-1669* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 337-546. A slit nose was a common fate for women deemed "whores," usually by other women (Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 103, 109). Pepys's wife, Elisabeth, threatens to slit Deb's nose (Latham, *Diary*, 369).

<sup>14</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 31, 37-8. Froide notes that in Norwich single women who were discovered to be out of service "were given the option of incarceration in the local Bridewell or finding a position in service within a set period of time" (31).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-42.

conditions created a cultural association between out of work maidservants, prostitution, and theft.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, conditions of urban life in early modern London generated a culture of slander. The mobility of workers and the lack of privacy offered by urban life led to a drastic increase in cases of defamation concerning women's credit in particular, which was always communicated in terms of their sexual conduct.<sup>17</sup> Knowing nothing about a new neighbor allowed room for accusations that may have been motivated by anxieties around immigration, urban crowding, increased competition for work, the moral reputation of one's neighborhood, and one's own credit. Furthermore, the sharing of spaces in increasingly crowded neighborhoods enabled neighbors to interpret one another's behavior indoors as well as in the streets.<sup>18</sup> Single women like Whitney's speaker who lived alone or in nontraditional households generated questions about just what they were up to indoors without paternal supervision, at the same time that any kind of business out of doors carried the stink of the market, public circulation, and of course, prostitution. Though the slandering of women was inevitably communicated in terms of sexual insult, these judgments were attached to circumstances of poverty and disease, regarded as among whoredom's causes and effects.<sup>19</sup> Just as anxieties around the economic burden of impoverished and cantankerous elderly widows of the village often led to their interpretation as witches, so the anxieties concerning unrestrained, mobile, and *economically vulnerable single*

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<sup>16</sup> Such was the thinking, even if some maidservants had more to fear from their masters than the other way around. Gowing cites the example of Susan More, a maidservant who lost her position when her master's business associate got her pregnant. More's testimony before a court concerned with her illegitimate child reveals that she had served in six households in five years (*Domestic Dangers*, 15-17). The mobility of maidservants endangered them as much as it threatened the imaginations of some commentators by freeing their masters and other members of the household from the accountability of longstanding relationships of service.

<sup>17</sup> See Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-29, 70-72, 100-101.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-7.

women in the city led to their interpretation as whores.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the circumstances of the personal narrative in *A Sweet Nosgay* link Whitney's speaker to a range of cultural slights and slanders that constitute a thematized credit crisis, one that I suggest resonates with Whitney's own credibility issues as a female professional author.

Whitney's speaker identifies as an author and, as we will see, self-consciously defends her choice to write in one of the familiar epistles. She calls frequent attention to the volume itself – as the product of her labor, as a gift she offers to various benefactors, as a book for sale at the bookstalls – and to its public audience. Authorship and publication are more than implicitly bound up in Is. W.'s credit crisis then. Lorna Hutson has also read *A Sweet Nosgay*'s preoccupation with credit both in terms of the early modern credit economy and the project of constructing credibility as a professional author. She argues that Whitney's strategies for legitimating her authorship are comparable to those of her male peers, the Elizabethan Prodigals, in the way that they engage cultural anxieties around trust. For Hutson Whitney's engagement with these anxieties ultimately undermines her authorship by calling attention to her lack of credibility in the manner we have seen: "None me credit dare." However, I argue that by recognizing the model of affectionate accreditation which Whitney develops with each section of her volume, we can understand how Is. W.'s seemingly self-defeating confession proves an effective, if paradoxical, rhetorical strategy for generating credit. In addition to offering an alternative to the credit economy's disenfranchisement, this model benefits Whitney's authorship by creating a sense of intimacy through the trials, personal disclosures, and confessional humor of her speaker, "Is. W." Like her persona's would-be creditors, readers can credit Whitney as an author based on affection and familiarity rather than the standard literary currency of patronage.

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<sup>20</sup> Gowing notes that "whore" was the most common sexual insult and was distinct from accusations of prostitution's financial exchange. See *Domestic Dangers*, 59-105.

Furthermore, for Whitney's speaker authorship and publication are vehicles for self-vindication. Is. W. is having a problem with the currency of her reputation. She needs to interject a sympathetic self-representation into that circulating language of communal judgment. Her volume becomes her defender, her good report in the marketplace.

The central conflict of *Much Ado* dramatizes, across several characters, a scenario comparable in some respects to the one I read in *A Sweet Nosgay*. Claudio has slandered Hero, and an impassioned Beatrice laments her inability to defend her cousin's honor: "O God that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market place" (4.2.304). Beatrice longs to play the man's part and challenge Claudio, but as she observes, honor founded on action has given way to persuasive words: "But manhood is melted into courtesies and valour into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones, too. He is now as valiant as Hercules that only tells a lie and swears to it" (4.2.314-17). When men are turned to tongue, the marketplace becomes a better venue for the circulation of print than the eating of hearts. Though Benedick challenges Claudio, it is ultimately an act of publication commissioned by Leonato that redresses Hero's disgrace: "Possess the people in Messina here/ How innocent she died, and if your love/ Can labour in sad invention,/ Hang her an epitaph upon her tomb/ And sing it to her bones" (5.1.265-69). Whitney constructs a persona with credit problems who authors her *own* defense.

A cultural model for such self-vindication can be found in the period's expanding documentation around court cases of defamation. Slander litigation was on the rise in the secular and ecclesiastical courts of late-sixteenth century London, and the majority of litigants in these cases were women.<sup>21</sup> Between 1572 and 1640, defamation cases rose from constituting a third of London's court business (in the 1590s) to three-quarters (in the 1630s), and the number of female

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<sup>21</sup> Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*.

plaintiffs increased fivefold.<sup>22</sup> This precipitous rise was specific to London where an expanding, mobile, and anxious population highly attuned to the importance of social credit turned to the courts to resolve personal disputes that could carry dire ramifications for the currency of reputation. Women made public interventions in the credit market through personal narratives as plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses.<sup>23</sup> In this public forum, women had recourse to defend their reputation as well as that of female kin and neighbors; here Beatrice might craft an indignant and redeeming testimony for Hero without once calling on the sword or sharp tongue of Benedick.

Defamation depositions offer an interesting counterpart to Whitney's volume because these documents relied on the creation of a narrative that negotiated various forms of meaning: the formal aspects of legal deposition; the deponent's own experience or version of events; answers to or a reframing of the defamer's accusations; and, importantly, gestures to conventional morality, cultural stereotypes and fears, common literary tropes and plots – all of which gave a narrative the ring of truth for its audience.<sup>24</sup> Whitney's text is similarly composed through a negotiation of genre, autobiographical elements, poetic adaptation and invention, as well as nods to the gender norms, social values, tropes, and anxieties that attend her persona's circumstances.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in the case of the church courts, narratives produced by litigants were often the primary means for conflict resolution rather than the formal administration of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 32-7.

<sup>23</sup> Women also had recourse to support their accusations against neighbors. Gowing's focus is often on the role of the defamer, who uses sexual insult to regulate ideals of social morality by circulating judgments about reputation and honor (*Domestic Dangers*, 113).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 42-58. For Gowing's extended discussion of the narratives of litigation, see 232-262.

<sup>25</sup> Editors, annotators, and biographers of Whitney present the circumstances offered in *A Sweet Nosgay* as autobiographical. See for instance Panofsky, "Introduction," xii-xiii; Betty Travitsky, "Whitney, Isabella (fl. 1566-1573)," *DNB*; and Danielle Clarke, "Introduction," *Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney and Aemilia Lanyer: Renaissance Women Poets* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), xiii-xvi.



justice.<sup>26</sup> Thus, storytelling in a public forum was already a means for women to defend their reputations in late-sixteenth century London.

This does not mean, however, that such interventions were always successful or without risk. As deponents and storytellers, women had to work against interrogations that held them to be inherently dishonest. Whether making accusations of a sexual nature, or defending against them, witnessing in defamation cases inevitably raised the specter of a female deponent's sexuality, a strike in and of itself, beyond the further questions its existence produced.<sup>27</sup> As with our own FICA system in which hard inquiries negatively impact our credit scores, questions about a female litigant's reputation provoked negative attention even where answers were more than satisfactory. Despite these discouragements, however, many women chose to go to court to accuse, defend, or witness in cases of defamation, suggesting that public interventions in personal credit problems were perceived to be worth the calculated risks.

By the late-seventeenth century, nearly a century later, women were writing and publishing with the express and clearly articulated purpose of self-vindication. Ramona Wray notes the following examples: Hester Shaw's defense against printed calumny, *A plaine relation of my sufferings*... (London, 1653), Susanna Parr's explanation for leaving her Independent congregation, *Susanna's apologie against the elders* ... (Oxford, 1659), and Anne Wentworth's for leaving her husband, *A true account of Anne Wentworth* ... (London, 1676).<sup>28</sup> All three

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<sup>26</sup> Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 40-3. "In many cases, it was the narratives of litigation themselves, rather than a final sentence decided from them, that carried the weight of dispute and that brought suits to the point at which they could be resolved or abandoned" (43).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 52, 76.

<sup>28</sup> I first encountered these examples in Wray's chapter on "Autobiography" in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 194-207. It is worth the space to include the full title of Shaw's narrative, which does its best to cram her side of the story onto the title page, maximizing the number of readers who will get the gist of her account: *A plaine relation of my sufferings, by that miserable combustion, which happened in Tower-street through the unhappy firings of a great quantity of gun-*

women begin their Vindications by apologizing for the necessity of distasteful publication, insisting that they do so only upon compulsion by their friends or God, and acknowledging the weakness and incapacities of their sex.<sup>29</sup> Anne Wentworth describes the task as “so contrary unto my nature, that I would rather suffer unto death than be seen in any publick way” (1). For Wentworth, then, ill repute was a fate worse than death. Susanna Parr opens her Vindication with a description of the conundrum faced by the slandered woman who turns to publication to clear her name: “It is a thorny path, and a myrie way that I am compelled to walke in; a way wherein there is a danger of loosing more in all likelyhood, rather then of regaining what is already lost” (A.2). Parr’s recognition of this risk helps suggest why there is such a significant gap between the initial rise of defamation litigation among women in the sixteenth century and the development of the self-authored Vindication as a print genre. As we have seen, even defamation testimonies carried some additional risk for the litigant’s reputation, but publication invited a host of fresh accusations and negative associations. That the Vindication became an avenue for women to intervene in their own credit crises is testament to the impact the printed word could have on reputation in early modern England. Whitney’s volume sets an early precedent for the personal credit crisis as a legitimating occasion for women’s authorship and publication.

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*powder, there the 4. of January 1650. Now printed that the world may see what just cause I had to complain of the injuries then done me, and how little reason Mr. Glendon minister of that parish had (especially after three years time and more) to defame me in print as a malicious slanderer of him (though I had strong reason to suspect, I did never positively charge with any thing.) Yet he with as much malice as impertinency, hath inserted his vindication (as he calls it) into his epistle to the reader, put a sermon of his, lately printed, entituled, Justification justified; wherein, however, he hath justified his doctrine, he hath condemned himself (as in reference to me) in the judgement of all rationall persons.*

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that Wentworth’s apology is far less rhetorically dismissive of her sex than Shaw’s or Parr’s. Though she acknowledges her “weakness” and “foolishness,” she finds authority for her actions in the will of God. She observes that God’s promise “includes daughters as well as sons” (1).

### III

*A Sweet Nosgay*'s three sections each correspond to forms traditionally associated with women readers and writers. Whitney negotiates the scandalous act of publication through permissible acts of female literacy: moral readings, private letters, and the transferral of property through wills.<sup>30</sup> The work begins with 110 moral precepts Whitney has versified from Hugh Plat's *Floures of Philosophie*. Whitney's speaker has taken comfort in Plat's volume during a difficult time and now presents readers with her favorite of its moral *sententiae* as a "nosgay" picked from Plat's garden to guard against "infection" each time she enters London's streets.<sup>31</sup> Is. W. claims that she has selected from Plat's 883 sentences those in which "my selfe dyd safety finde,/ by smelling to the same" (A.vii). However, the first 100 of her 110 quatrains correspond exactly to Plat's first 100 with only a couple of exceptions, suggesting that these selections are less personalized than indicated. Nonetheless, the themes that recur across these "phylosophicall flowers" are highly relevant to the personal narrative found throughout *A Sweet Nosgay*. Many define a moral attitude towards material goods and wealth (e.g., value them for their use; be willing to bestow them on others; never profit at the expense of neighbors and friends; the most valuable things in life are immaterial). Precepts about friendship speak to its importance in times of adversity, and the difficulties presented by the absence or fickleness of friends when they *are*

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<sup>30</sup> Beilin, "Writing Public Poetry," observes, on the other hand, that the three sections align with genres "strongly associated with humanist learning: adages, familiar letters, and verse satire" (4). That both are true is the more to Whitney's credit, and perhaps reflects the different audiences Whitney may have imagined for her work. Generally Whitney's audience is understood to be a popular one. Some critics, such as Suzanne Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English books for women, 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1981), identify her works as written for an audience of 'middle class' women like herself (214). Others, such as Jones, *Currency of Eros*, identify "a double public" of male and female readers (51). Marilyn Sandidge, "Urban Space as Social Conscience in Isabella Whitney's 'Wyll and Testament,'" in *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), describes Whitney's audience as "the urban middle class" but imagines that for the "Wyll and Testament" she may have had in mind an audience that could effect change in the city, such as "those within city government, social institutions and the justice systems who needed to sharpen their social consciences" (612).

<sup>31</sup> Hull identifies Hugh Plat as an author who specifically targeted women readers, though she does not list this particular title (*Chaste, Silent*, 194).

most needed. A number of the sentences urge readers to use words kindly and with truth, giving no heed to rumors, gossip, and flattery. Others treat love, typically from the male lover's perspective, though on occasion, Whitney rounds these out with the woman's part.

Because Whitney's adaptation is so close to the first portion of Plat's work, those moments where she strays from her source reveal her own thematic commitments. Whitney's final nine precepts do not follow Plat's sequence but are taken from diverse points throughout his 883 sentences. Because Plat's volume includes a topical index, it is likely that here Whitney did make more particular selections based on their relevance to themes with which she was concerned. The range of topics among Whitney's final nine selected precepts – in Plat's words: “law,” “gold,” “tounge,” “pleasing,” “wicked” – presents an overarching concern with reputation and an inability to defend one's character, particularly through litigation, against money, power, and the work of tongues. The set concludes with the consolation that the “wicked” will get their due, a sentiment that is repeated at various points across Whitney's volume. A similar focus is suggested by Whitney's singular radical alteration to one of Plat's philosophical flowers. His eleventh sentence reads, “Our ear must be open to every accusation.”<sup>32</sup> Whitney alters this to state its opposite: “Our ears we must not ever ope/ to each mans accusation:/ Nor without tryall, trust too much/ to any ones perswation” (B.iii). Presumably the virtue Plat recommends is the equitable weighing of all sides of a story, but the formulation makes no provisions for false accusations and slanderous tongues. Whitney's pointed revision urges readers to adopt a more skeptical attitude, to doubt rather than “be open to” unproven accusations. Plat's formulation imagines himself and his readers in the role of arbiters, and though Whitney maintains his first person plural perspective, her contrary moral prescription, as well as her carefully selected final

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<sup>32</sup> From Panofsky's facsimile, *Floures of Philosophie*, 2 (of Plat's volume). Plat's work was published in London in 1572.

nine precepts, reflect her persona's position as one vulnerable to "each mans accusation."

Whitney makes Plat's flowers her own by turning them to her chosen persona's defense.

Whitney's moral verses conclude with a farewell to the reader in which Is. W. imagines that her appropriation of Plat's volume as her own literary property might raise accusations of theft – one of the suspicions plaguing her credit. She expresses the hope that "he who ought the plot,/ wherein the same dyd grow:/ Fume not to see them borne aboute,/ and wysh he did mee know,/ And say in rage were she a man/ that with my flowers doth brag,/ She well should pay the price, I wolde/ not leave her worth a rag" (C.vi). With this nervous bit of humor, Whitney's speaker imagines herself the potential target of litigation, raising questions about who was allowed to borrow from whom.<sup>33</sup> Judgments made about who was an author and who a plagiarist were shaped by a writer's class and gender. Just as maidservants were presumed to be thieves, women writers were particularly susceptible to charges of "transgressive appropriation."<sup>34</sup> Is. W. presents her gender as an obstacle to Plat's imagined suit, despite the fact that, as a *feme sole*, she – and Whitney for that matter – *could* be sued. By suggesting that Mr. Plat, "a Gentyلمان/ and full of courteseye" (A.vii), would only seek redress if she were a man, Is. W. ironically turns her identity as a woman writer into license for borrowing Plat's work.

Is. W. claims ownership of her borrowed literary property by emphasizing her intimate relationship with Plat's volume and those relationships she seeks to nurture with her own book as a gift. She reposed many hours in Plat's garden, came to know the "Maze" of his Plot (B.i), made bold "to come when as I wyll" (A.vii), and now passes her selection of his precepts on to friend-

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<sup>33</sup> Plat himself took many of his moral sentences from various medieval texts of pseudo-Senecan literature. Panofsky, "Introduction," vi-vii.

<sup>34</sup> See Laura Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England: Gender, Authorship, Literary Property* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 4 and pp. 1-12 for a broader discussion. Rosenthal observes, "The capacity to be understood as an owner of cultural property can rarely be taken for granted, and the difference between legitimate and illegitimate forms of appropriation often has less to do with the amount of text repeated than with the identity of the author" (3-4).

readers. Plat's book has been a friend in her solitude and adversity, guarding her against infection, and the gifts of this friendship she now passes on to nurture others. Whitney's persona uses the book to repay her fellow countryman George Mainwaring, a "dere friend" (A.iii) – who she evidently owes big time.<sup>35</sup> She describes the gift as "recompense for the least of a great number of benefits, which I have from time to time (even from our Childhood hitherto) receaved of you" (A.iii). In the familiar epistles of the miscellany's midsection, Is. W. asks her brother Geoffrey to present the book to her former Mistress, perhaps in hopes of renewing this relationship: "Receave of me, and eke accept, a simple token heare:/ A smell of such a Nosegay as/ I do for present beare,/ Unto a virtuous Ladye, which tyll death I honour wyll/ The losse I had of service hers,/ I languish for it styll" (C.vii). Thus, Whitney has her speaker address questions concerning literary property and debt by depicting her book as a gift, to her from Plat's volume and from her to various readers with whom she seeks to initiate or sustain a relationship. Significantly, each of these relationships has an economic dimension. Her readers are purchasers of her book. Mainwaring is a kind of creditor, and her Mistress, a former (and potentially future) employer. However, Whitney's speaker emphasizes instead the affective ties between them through the circulation of her book as a gift.

#### IV

The verse epistles that constitute the work's midsection establish Is. W.'s connections to family and friends and offer a "private" account of her character and circumstances. The epistles show her to have an extensive network of family and friends, ties to various households, from

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<sup>35</sup> Mainwaring was the son of a prominent family in Cheshire, Whitney's home county (Travitsky, "Whitney, Isabella"). Isabella's brother Geoffrey dedicates Emblem 139 in his book of emblems to Mainwaring as well. It seems the dedicatee was a childhood friend to the Whitney siblings. See R.J. Fehrenbach, "Isabella Whitney, Sir Hugh Plat, Geoffrey Whitney, and 'Sister Eldershae,'" *English Language Notes* 21.1 (Sept, 1983), 10.

whom she is separated.<sup>36</sup> Letters enable Whitney's persona to maintain these ties, to continue to participate in the flow of resources and support that move across them, despite her isolation in London. That Whitney would turn to letters in a poetic project concerned with credit management proceeds directly from women's private writing practices in the period. Early modern English women's letters are characteristically concerned with the management and circulation of their wealth and property and with the networks this circulation fosters.<sup>37</sup> By making public this private genre, Whitney's speaker circulates a self-representation that defies her status as an unattached and unsupported single woman of questionable credit.

Across these letters to siblings, cousins, and friends, Is. W. depicts herself requesting and repaying support as well as bestowing it on others. In a letter to a brother, "G.W.," the speaker admonishes him for neglecting his responsibilities to her. G.W. has left the city with no word of where he might be reached, an absence that concerns Is. W. because this brother is her primary means of support. In pathos-ridden verse, the speaker reminds G.W. of his filial duty: "No yeldyng yeare she me allowes,/nor goodes hath me assind./ But styll to friends I must appeale/ (and next our Parentes deare,)/ You are, and must be chiefest staffe/ that I shal stay on heare" (C.vi-vii). Is. W. also positions herself as debtor to a married sister "Misteris A.B.," describing this relationship as inherent: "nature dyd you bynde:/ To doo mee good: and to requight,/ hath nature mee inclynde:/ Wherefore good Sister take in gree,/ These simple lynnes that come from mee" (D.ii). As with her dedication to Mainwarring, the speaker uses her pen to acquit her debts to this married sister with expressions of goodwill.

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<sup>36</sup> The letters also *emphasize* the degree to which her physical separation from this network contributes to her difficulties. Ellinghausen has emphasized "the aloneness evident in Whitney's self-presentation as a woman without 'a Husband, or a house'" and has argued that her tendency to remind us of her isolation "is at least as important as her allusions to past and present communities" ("Literary Property and the Single Woman," 2).

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Mazzola, *Women's Wealth and Women's Writing in Early Modern England: "Little Legacies" and the Materials of Motherhood* (Farnham & Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), p. 3.

To her younger sisters in service, on the other hand, Whitney plays the part of benefactor, paying forward the wisdom and experience she gained during her own time as a maidservant. The speaker advises her sisters to be pious, diligent, and loyal, and – touching specifically on the anxieties we have seen around maidservants – “[a]ll wanton toyes, [...] now exile out of your minde” and “[s]ee that their Plate be safe, and that no Spooone do lacke” (C.viii-D.i). She expresses a desire to continue this patronage through her writing: “I some thing nedes must write,/ take paynes to read the same:/ Hencefoorth my lyfe as wel as pen/ shall your examples frame” (D.i). Is. W. has similarly played counselor to her friend “Master T.L” who she now accuses of being a prodigal spender of her good advice: “And oft in writing wolde I say/ good friend beware of such./ But all my words they weare as wind/ my labour yll was spent” (D.viii). In each of these letters, the speaker shows herself giving and receiving support across kinship ties and emphasizes how her writing in particular enables her to bestow benefits and repay them.

The familiar letters allow Is. W. to address her appeals for sympathy, ultimately directed at a public audience, to trusted friends and family. Turning to one such friend in a moment of despair, the speaker presents herself as a victim suffering from the “spite” of others: “Therefore, in this perplexitie, to you deare frende I write:/ You know mine endless miserie, you know, how some me spite:/ with counsel cure, fore feare of wracke,/ And help to beare, that breakes my backe” (D.vi). By sharing the lessons of her experience with her sisters, she is able to present herself as the victim of false report. She warns them of the lies “that many wyll devise” and their destructive effects on the fragile currency of reputation: “For words they are but winde, yet words may hurt you so:/ And you shall never brook the same, yf that you have a foe./ God shyld you from all such, as would by word or Byll./ Procure your shame, or never cease tyll they have wrought you yll” (C.viii). The specific reference here to a “Byll” as an instrument through which



others might “procure your shame” could refer to a circulating pamphlet or to a legal document for debt, a bill obligatory – both scenarios applicable to the speaker’s circumstances. As the target of malicious tongues, Is. W. is highly conscious of the circulation of slander and libel. As a figure associated with Ludgate Prison, Whitney allows the possibility that her speaker could be on the wrong side of a delinquent bill obligatory. Whether the victim of libel or debt litigation, Is. W. secures the sympathy of her audience by making them partners to the trust between intimates.

The familiar epistles also enable Whitney’s persona to address her suspect circumstances. Her vocation as a writer, for instance, receives its most moving defense in the letter addressed to her married sister when she offers a frank description of their different paths:

Good Sister so I you commend, to him that made us all:  
I know you huswifery intend, though I to writing fall:  
Wherefore no lenger shal you stay,  
From businesse, that profit may.  
Had I a Husband, or a house, and all that longes therto  
My selfe could frame about to rouse, as other women doo:  
But til some houshold cares mee tye,  
My bookes and Pen I wyll apply. (D.ii)

Is. W. addresses the contrast between her unorthodox path and her sister’s conventional circumstances – a contrast Whitney’s audience might also have in mind. Whitney’s speaker presents her choice to write not as one made in lieu of marriage but as one made in the absence of husband and home. She presents the viewpoint that single life has chosen her, thus far, not the other way around. Is. W.’s autonomy lies rather in her choice of how to manage her single life and the credit crisis in which she finds herself: “My bookes and Pen I wyll apply.”

## V

Whitney’s speaker employs her most radical strategy for managing credit in the concluding mock will and testament. As with *Much Ado*’s Hero, Is. W.’s final response to ill

repute is to feign her own death and allow the circulation of print to speak on her behalf. Is. W.'s departure from London occasions this tactic. She treats the occasion as one for making her final will and testament in which an anatomized London serves as both heir and bequest. In a "communication" to London that precedes the will, the speaker addresses the city as a pitiless lover: "that never once a help wold finde,/ to ease me in distress./ Thou never yet, woldst credit geve to boord me for a yeare:/ Nor with Apparell me releve/ except thou payed weare" (E.iii). As with Hero's strategically feigned death, Is. W. imagines her own as the result of a lover's cruelty. She has finally learned to "swarve" away from this heartless lover but insists she is "in no angry moode." As she does with Plat's volume, the speaker claims ownership of London – its streets, buildings, goods, coins, and characters – through her intimate relationship with the city. By redistributing this "Treasury" amongst London's denizens according to their needs, Whitney again posits a model of accreditation based on "perfect love and charity" (E.iii).<sup>38</sup>

The will's detailed chorography of London proceeds from Is. W.'s affection for the city at the same time that it ultimately puts forward a satiric critique of the city's exclusion of certain populations, including herself. As she makes her bequests, the speaker depicts London's vibrant commercial culture from the perspective of a young person besotted with its energy and variety, and "loth to leave the Citie" (E.ii). Here can be found all the commodities one might need or desire, but for the problem of payment. Enabled by the play of the mock-testament, Whitney's speaker freely bestows all the city has to offer to its denizens as needed.<sup>39</sup> But the city's

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<sup>38</sup> Sandidge, "Urban Space," reads the "Wyll and Testament" as an indictment of London's uncharitable commercial conscience and an appeal to social conscience.

<sup>39</sup> Ingram has emphasized the suitability of Whitney's chosen genre, the mock-testament, for her purposes in this section of the miscellany. "Certain mock-testament conventions, including the 'outsider' status of the dead or dying and often impoverished speaker, and the shattering of social stratification, further Whitney's primary goals: she is both dramatizing the ambitious female writer's plight as an 'outsider,' and calling for the opening of credit networks to the city's marginalized figures" (*Idioms*, 74). Crystal Bartolovich, "Optimism of the Will": Isabella Whitney and Utopia," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.2 (2009), describes the will as a temporal utopia. Wall,

incompatibility with such largesse keeps intruding on the speaker's charitable will: "If they that keepe what I you leave,/ aske Mony: when they sell it:/ At Mint, there is such store, it is/ impossible to tell it" (E.v). In the London Is. W. would leave to its people, coin is just another plentiful commodity there for the taking, but the realities of London's monetary requirements enter the will as an indictment of the city's cruelty.

Is. W. turns to the city's seedy underside, its most exploited working sorts, and its criminalized underclass, all of whom are, like herself, disenfranchised in various ways from the hearty commercial culture described by the will's earlier bequests. She evokes familiar city tropes of criminality, including some of the "infections" that haunt her character. She conjures the image of prostitution, linking it explicitly to young single working class men and women like herself. She describes apprentices who "seeke for proper Gyrles,/ and some perhaps shall fynde:/ That neede compels, or lucre lures/ to satisfye their mind" (E.v). Here bad behavior is a response to economic constraints and temptations. The frustrated apprentices "must not wed/ except they leave their trade." The "proper Gyrles" they seek out are of another sort from the "Fruitwives" Whitney leaves at "every Gate under the walles . . . to entertayne/ such as come in and out" (E.vii).<sup>40</sup> They are instead young women of little means looking to share in the plenty Whitney's speaker describes in London's commercial culture, would-be maidservants perhaps. The representation of these bawdy, financially-strapped young men and women, the speaker's peers in many respects, appears counter-productive since this is a role in which she has been cast. And yet, as with her bequests to the city's poor prisoners, the speaker's frank depiction of this element with which she is associated allows her the opportunity to treat them with "perfect love

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"Female Legacy," reads Whitney's "Wyll and Testament" through a tradition of legacy in which women used will-making as an opportunity to create texts and enter the circulation of print.

<sup>40</sup> The OED defines "fruit-wife" as "a woman who sells fruit; also, a bawd."

and charity” as she would have London do to her. In her will Is. W. remembers these young men and women with a publicly-minded bequest: “And neare the same, I houses leave,/ for people to repayre:/ To bathe themselves, so to prevent/ infection of the ayre” (E.v). It is unclear whether the houses the speaker leaves here are brothels or proper bathhouses for the public. Either way, the speaker’s representation of this population and her charitable, while pragmatic, bequest demonstrates her keen understanding of the role London’s commercial culture plays in the spread of infections popularly cast onto those most exploited and excluded from that culture. Is. W. models the kind of “perfect love and charity” London should have for its inhabitants who suffer from the same sickness as herself – poverty or perhaps just bad credit.

This brings us back to the point of departure for this reading, the Ludgate Prison passage. Is. W. turns to her long list of bequests for the imprisoned poor, a population among which she suspects her audience would number her. Immediately upon dissociating herself from Ludgate through her insolvency and lack of credit, Is. W. points us to the location she would rather have us associate with her: “To all the Booke binders by Paulles/ because I lyke their Arte:/ They e’ry week shal mony have,/ when they from Bookes departe./ Amongst them all, my Printer must,/ have somewhat to his share:/ I wyll my friends these Bookes to bye/ of him, with other ware” (E.vii). Is. W. removes herself from Ludgate Prison, then, and places herself instead on the bookstalls of St. Pauls where she directs her friends and audience to go buy some books. Whitney’s speaker rewrites the place to which her name and reputation will attach when she leaves London, and throws in an advertisement for Richard Jones, Whitney’s printer whose investment in her work she here publicly repays.

Once Is. W. has divested herself of all the aspects of London she loves and loses with her departure, she asks to keep only one item: “And let me have a shrouding Sheete/ to cover mee

from shame:/ And in obliuyon bury mee/ and never more mee name” (E.viii). The expressed desire belies the thematic focus and purpose of the volume: to answer bad credit with a self-representation that leaves behind a name in good standing. The statement contributes, however, to the pathos of the speaker’s dramatic and strategic farewell. *Much Ado*’s Francis Friar frames a similar plan to “[c]hange slander to remorse”: “She dying, as it must be so maintain’d,/ Upon the instant that she was accus’d,/ Shall be lamented, pitied, and excus’d/ Of every hearer; for it so falls out/ That what we have we prize not to the worth/ Whiles we enjoy it, but being lack’d and lost,/ Why then we rack the value, then we find/ The virtue that possession would not show us / Whiles it was ours” (4.1.210-21). Is. W. too seeks the remorse of her offenders and bystanders in addition to the redemption of her name: “To all that aske what end I made,/ and how I went away:/ Thou answer maist like those which here,/ no longer tary may. / [...] And tell them further, if they wolde,/ my presence styll have had:/ They should have sought to mend my luck;/ which ever was too bad” (E.viii).

Though Whitney’s persona makes London her “sole executor, because/ I lov’d thee best” (E.viii), she knows all too well that the city will continue to withhold its treasures from those who cannot pay. For her part, with this will Is. W. has shown herself to be all paid up. Though she flees the city – possibly from predatory creditors – in leaving, all her beloved treasures have been taken from her one by one, as if through the distraint that would follow an action of debt, and she depicts herself buried in oblivion, not unlike the fate that would have awaited her in Ludgate. Thus, just as the speaker uses affective, intimate ties to Plat’s volume and to family and friends to shore up her credit, her final move is to translate her affection for London, who she loves best, into a currency that can be paid through its divestiture. However, if the rhetorical and poetic strategies she employs in *A Sweet Nosgay* are indeed effective measures

for intervening in the public credit market for a single woman unattached to a household, as I have argued, then Is. W. will at least have her good name, and the poet Isabella Whitney, some well deserved credibility as an author.

CHAPTER THREE  
**True Interest and the Affections:  
The Dangers of Lawful Lending in *The Merchant of Venice***<sup>1</sup>

When Antonio solicits Shylock for a loan in *The Merchant of Venice*, he expects and even requests the usury that will express their difference and enmity:

If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not  
As to thy friends; for when did friendship take  
A breed for barren metal of his friend?  
But lend it rather to thine enemy,  
Who if he break, thou mayst with better face  
Exact the penalty. (1.3.125-32)<sup>2</sup>

Shylock insists, however, that he will lend to Antonio in “kindness,” that courtesy reserved by the play’s characters for those of their own kind: “I would be friends with you, and have your love,/ Forget the shames that you have stained me with,/ Supply your present wants, and take no doit/ Of usance for my moneys; . . . This is kind I offer” (1.3.133-37). In adopting the play’s Christian model of lending, Shylock picks up the language of sociability. Indeed, Shylock’s “merry bond” (1.3.169) is so effectively offered in terms of amity, that Antonio comes close to recognizing a kinship between them: “The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind” (1.3.174).

Shylock’s “kind” lending to Antonio takes the form of a debt bond, an instrument of lending widely used in England that in cases of default permitted the loaning party to take interest, a lawful alternative to usury. Literary critics tend to conflate interest and usury and to read the play’s distinction between the lending practices of Christians and Shylock as free

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was previously published under this title in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 14.1 (Winter 2014), 32-62.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from the play are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Greenblatt et al (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).

lending versus usury. This forgets, however, that interest was lawful compensation for defaults in certain forms of “free” lending. Craig Muldrew notes that in early modern England, “interest was always charged on bonds because there was a great demand for such a secure form of credit.”<sup>3</sup> The fact is less surprising when we recognize that, despite common usage, “[t]he term interest meant something quite different from usury, and referred to the interest the lender had in the success and profit of the borrower’s business who was using the money lent, or credit extended on bond. The interest rate represented his share in this [ . . . ].”<sup>4</sup> Charging interest, then, true interest, differed from usury. It proceeded directly from the legal notion of “having an interest in” property loaned, and it presumably joined creditor and debtor in the goal of “mutual advantage.”<sup>5</sup>

This essay reminds *Merchant*’s readers of this early modern distinction in order to draw attention to the play’s treatment of *lawful* lending practices and their basis in Christian affections. Reading true interest back into the play helps us to better understand the representation of Christian lending practices against the foil of a usury that was often condemned as un-Christian. I argue that Shakespeare’s audience would have found in the play’s juxtaposition *and* conflation of lawful lending practices with usury a critique of those practices officially defined so strongly against *the* definitive economic sin of usury. Shylock’s bond, I suggest, would have signified to early modern audiences as an inside joke about the direction of commercial culture and law in their Christian society: what does a vengeful usurer do when he *really* wants to stick it to a debtor? He lends freely and prays for default.

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<sup>3</sup> Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation: the Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 113.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



Interest differs from usury most fundamentally in its conceptual affective framing as cooperative and amicable. “Use” was a rate over and above the principal charged for time used and determined in advance as due along with the principal repayment. Typically, “interest” was a sum over and above the principal that would become due only if and when the principal was not repaid by an agreed-upon date.<sup>6</sup> Where usury was the lender’s profit for allowing his borrower the *use* of his money, interest was compensation for the lender’s loss of the principal in recognition of his *verum interesse*, or true interest, in the property lent.<sup>7</sup> As Eric Kerridge explains, a lender could claim interest under one of four extrinsic titles: *poena conventionalis* (the conventional penalty, or “forbearance”), *damnum emergens* (“emergent loss”), *lucrum cessans* (“cessant gain”), or *periculum sortis* (“risky ventures”).<sup>8</sup> The first of these, *poena conventionalis*, was the most common form of interest in early modern England, and the bond dramatized by *The Merchant of Venice* offers an example of this kind.<sup>9</sup> In such cases, “[a] contract for a loan stipulated a penalty to be paid in event of repayment of the principal being delayed beyond a specified, agreed date... This penalty was usually a percentage of the sum borrowed and was the compensation earned by the creditor for his forbearance in not having the debtor’s bond or obligation forfeited or taking legal proceedings to recover the principal.”<sup>10</sup> Interest rates were by law ten percent or lower, a moderate rate that further distinguished interest from usury. In theory, the conventional penalty of interest for forbearance offered the creditor

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<sup>6</sup> Kerridge, *Usury, Interest and the Reformation* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2002). Kerridge explains that three of the four extrinsic titles to interest (forbearance, emergent loss, and cessant gain) usually depended on *titulus morae*, “tardy or defaulted repayment of a loan” (7).

<sup>7</sup> Kerridge, *Usury*, 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> For Kerridge’s discussion of the four extrinsic titles to interest, see 7-12. See also Norman Jones, *God and the Moneylenders: Usury and Law in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Kerridge, *Usury*, 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

reasonable compensation and the debtor reasonable penalty until the principal might be paid. In his bond with Antonio, Shylock appears to offer such interest-earning forbearance by stipulating the alternative (and presumably unprofitable) penalty of a pound of flesh in “merry sport” (1.3.141).<sup>11</sup>

In addition to these formal differences, usury and interest were characterized as morally and philosophically distinct. Interest had been allowed by St. Ambrose and the Schoolmen as it was by Reformation theologians such as Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, and Calvin.<sup>12</sup> Following the 1571 *Act Against Usury*, which solidified interest’s legal status in England, an Elizabethan memorandum gives public notice of this moral distinction in the following terms:

Usury and trewe interest be thinges as contrary as falshed is to trewth. For usury contayneth in itself inequalitie and unnaturall dealinge and trewe interest observeth equitie and naturall dealinge. Usury tendeth to the destruction of the common wealthe, but the borrowing of money or any other thinge, yielding to the lender trewe and just interest, is one of the commodities which issued by the societie of man.<sup>13</sup>

The notice sets up a distinct moral binary. Against usury’s unnatural destructive dealing, interest is justified by its conception as a natural social bond that unites the interests of lender and borrower in a common weal. Thus, while usury was a criminal offense in early modern England and a spiritual offense as far back as Anglo-Saxon law can be traced,<sup>14</sup> “trewe interest” was a

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<sup>11</sup> Critics have established the penalty’s economic value. Amanda Bailey’s essay “Shylock and the Slaves,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62.1 (2011) demonstrates how early modern property law regarded flesh and money “as comparable forms of property” (2), suggesting that Shylock’s insistence on the penalty rather than repayment can be understood as fiscally sound in that it is an assertion of his rights as a property owner. Wilson notes the bond’s commensuration of money and flesh is similar to fixed compensation for bodily injury in early insurance (30). For Kerridge, the excessive nature of Shylock’s penalty ultimately renders it usurious, nullifying his claim to interest (8).

<sup>12</sup> For Kerridge’s discussion of medieval theology on usury and interest, see 17-19; for Reformation theology on the subject, see 23-52.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in R.H. Tawney’s introduction to *A Discourse Upon Usury by Thomas Wilson* (New York: Harcourt, 1925), 155. Tawney cites the original source as “S.P.D. Eliz. LXXV, No. 54,” an Elizabethan memorandum regarding public policy on moneylending (141n2, 148n1).

<sup>14</sup> See Kerridge 56 and Jones 47-48. Jones observes that statutory law did not address usury until 1487. Before this it fell within the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts (47-48).

form of lending that claimed to be consistent with the affective and moral obligations inherent in Christian fellowship.

That *Merchant's* central bond is an instance of interest rather than usury was observed three decades ago by Walter Cohen. "The crisis of the play," he writes, "arises not from [Shylock's] insistence on usury, but from his refusal of it. The contrast is between usury, which is immoral ... and interest, which is perfectly acceptable... Antonio immediately recognizes that Shylock's proposal falls primarily into the latter category."<sup>15</sup> And yet critical attention has remained focused on usury, and understandably so; with Shylock's vilification as a Jewish usurer, the play participates in a broader anti-usury discourse that David Hawkes has shown to be astonishingly pervasive in the culture.<sup>16</sup> However, following interest's legalization in 1571, anti-usury tracts took as their subject the justification of interest alongside the condemnation of usury. Interest's truth depended heavily on usury's falsehood, and yet the economic and moral discourses of the time reveal a slippery slope between the two. In practice, lawful lending could be as "biting" as usury.<sup>17</sup> For this reason anti-usury tracts are useful for tracking the discursive distinctions *and* endemic conflations between interest and usury.

Amanda Bailey has recently shifted attention from usury to debt and the problems of ethical ownership presented by the occasion of forfeiture in the play, asserting that "our preoccupation" with usury "has circumscribed the parameters of inquiry and delimited the assumptions we bring to bear about the kinds of monetary and moral economies *The Merchant of*

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<sup>15</sup> Cohen, "*The Merchant of Venice* and the Possibilities of Historical Criticism," *English Literary Renaissance* 49.4 (1982), 769.

<sup>16</sup> Hawkes, *The Culture of Usury in Renaissance England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> See Hawkes, *Culture of Usury*, 20-23. Hawkes notes that, despite legal distinctions, anti-usury discourse struggled with defining usury. It was often conceived broadly to include practices that were technically legal. Ultimately, Hawkes suggests, usury was "first and foremost an attitude" (23).

*Venice* explores.”<sup>18</sup> Bailey’s examination provides “an important historical corrective” to the common critical conflation of usury and debt (6). However, it draws no distinction between usury and interest.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, most critics writing about *Merchant* use “interest” and “usury” interchangeably, mimicking the kind of rhetorical slippage Miles Mosse observes in his 1595 collection of anti-usury sermons, *The Arraignment and Conviction of Usurie*: “[w]e say commonly he taketh upon Interest, he payeth Interest, he lendeth upon Interest: when our meaning and intendement is to say, he taketh upon usurie, he payeth usurie, he lendeth for usurie. And therefore the words being confounded in our common use of speech, no mervaille though they be coupled and united together of the interpreters in this place.”<sup>20</sup> The “interpreters” Mosse writes of are those early modern writers assessing the opinions of Reformed theologians on the validity of interest versus usury, but the same goes for today’s literary interpreters trying to read the juxtaposition of economic forms in *The Merchant of Venice*. Readings that fail to sufficiently distinguish lawful lending practices from usury end up focusing on the play’s point of comparison rather than its target. This essay seeks to expand on Bailey’s historical corrective by distinguishing true interest from usury. Attending to this distinction helps us understand

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<sup>18</sup> Bailey, *Of Bondage: debt, property, and personhood in early modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 3. For similar observations, see Theodore Leinwand, *Theatre, Finance, and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 5-6; and Ian MacInnes, “‘Ill Luck, Ill Luck?': Risk and Hazard in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Global Traffic: Discourses and Practices of Trade in English Literature and Culture from 1550 to 1700*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 40. MacInnes reads the play’s central opposition of economic forms to be between usury and venture.

<sup>19</sup> Bailey observes, “[b]y 1600, ‘interest’ was not only the word for money paid on a loan but also the legal term for having title in property” (“Shylock” 10); however, the essay does not explore the related category of lawful interest on debt bonds that proceeded from the notion of borrower and lender sharing interests in property. Rather, for the purposes of Bailey’s essay, charging “interest” refers to “use,” as when she describes the debt bond as “an interest-free loan” (5). Instead, Bailey draws a distinction between “‘use’ as interest and ‘use’ as trust” (10); however, I contend that this latter category was regarded in the period as “true interest” and that its resonance with Christian affections—trust, amity—distinguished it legally and conceptually from “use.”

<sup>20</sup> Mosse, *The Arraignment and Conviction of Usurie* (London, 1595), 2.

Shylock's motivation in lending to Antonio, Antonio's complicity in his near-fatal default, and the play's treatment of Christian affective-economic forms.

When Shylock offers to “take no doit/of usance for my moneys,” he yokes his interest to Antonio's fiscal well-being in a gesture of seeming friendship. Why would Shylock be concerned for the well-being of a man against whom he has sworn to “feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him” (1.3.42)? I suggest that here Shylock embraces the play's Christian model of lending as a form of revenge. By lending in “kindness” to Antonio (that is, by taking his bond without contracting for usury), Shylock can nominate a penalty and lawfully claim it in the name of interest if Antonio defaults. Reading Shylock's bond in this way turns Antonio's condemnation of usury—as the best way to “exact the penalty” from an enemy—against the merchant's own Christian lending practices. Shylock's bond takes advantage of these practices, demonstrates how they deviate from the ideal of Christian love that rhetorically legitimized them, and points to the destructive nature of Antonio's own affective lending. This critique of the play's lawful lending practices suggests the problematically conjoined nature of Christian affective ideals—amity, trust, mercy—and destructive passions, specifically Shylock's vengeance and Antonio's self-sacrifice. In short, true interest's basis in Christian sociability renders it, in *The Merchant of Venice*, a lawful vehicle for expressing a range of interpersonal affections that might lead to destructive ends. The dangers of affective lending are countered in the play by Portia's pragmatic balancing of self-love, or self-interest, against the destructive passions inscribed in Christian sociability.

### **Affective Economics**

Locating interest within the play's representation of Christian lending practices helps us to make sense of *Merchant's* affective economics, shedding light on those exchanges in which

economic and emotional motivations and content are indiscrete.<sup>21</sup> The legitimizing affective framework of true interest rests on the supposition that debt acquired in love will be discharged in love, an assumption that Shylock's vengeful bond problematizes.<sup>22</sup> Critics are sometimes inclined to separate Shylock's vengeance from his economics, a strange tendency in the criticism of a play so emphatic about the inextricability of the affections and money.<sup>23</sup> Economics in *Merchant* cannot be understood without reference to those affections that shape it, conceptually and dramatically. Shylock's vengeance should not be written out of his economics, for similarly vindictive affective pursuits and responses permeated early modern debt relations despite the conceptual and discursive insistence on lawful debt's basis in Christian love.

Craig Muldrew's influential work on early modern England's culture of credit provides a useful frame of reference for understanding the emotive dimension of lending practices in England and the affective debt relations represented in *Merchant*. Of the interplay between emotion and economic language and structures, Muldrew writes, "In early modern discourse about the market, economic trust was interpreted in terms as emotive as other forms of human interaction such as neighbourliness, friendship and marriage, while, conversely, interest and contract, which now might be thought of as purely pragmatic economic relations, were concepts

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<sup>21</sup> I use the term "affective economics" rather than Leinwand's "affective economies" to avoid the metaphorical value of the term "economies" as observed by Bruster (72-74). Despite this change in terminology, this essay rests upon Leinwand's premise that "particular economic decisions may be bound up with a wide variety of affect" (141). My use of "affective economics" bears no relation to the media scholar Henry Jenkins's contemporary use of the term in *Convergence Culture* (2006).

<sup>22</sup> Jones observes that an important shift in the growing legitimacy of some forms of interest came with the recognition that "in most loans there was an element of good faith." He explains: "[i]n the Middle Ages the assumption had been that the lender must have evil intent if interest was charged; from the beginning of the sixteenth century there was a tendency to presume that the lender's intentions were good unless it could be proven otherwise" (13).

<sup>23</sup> Cohen's and Bailey's ("Shylock") arguments both effectively separate Shylock's vengeance from his economics. Cohen suggests Shylock's vengeance makes it impossible to understand his motives as economic. Conversely, Bailey insists Shylock's decision makes good economic sense and is not motivated by vengeance. For an example of readings that take seriously the play's affective economics, see Leinwand and Engle.

applied to a much broader spectrum of social interaction.”<sup>24</sup> Muldrew’s study reminds us that the “economic” did not exist as a discrete and impersonal category for early modern minds, or texts, and that relationships of borrowing and lending proceeded from relationships ideally defined by amity, charity, and trust. In *The Economy of Obligation*, Muldrew claims that the emotive basis of early modern credit encouraged communal cooperation and, more often than not, provided a means for conflict resolution. And yet a closer look at Muldrew’s work reminds us that, despite the emphasis on Christian love and trust as affective ideals underwriting lawful lending, these were only a few of the emotional forces shaping debt relations.<sup>25</sup> Destructive passions determined early modern debt interactions as well.<sup>26</sup>

Muldrew’s extensive primary evidence documents a culture in crisis marked by widespread failures of trust followed by litigation and imprisonment. The late sixteenth century saw a historic rise in litigation in England: Muldrew calculates that the total litigation occurring in all courts throughout the realm during this period would have amounted to “over one suit for every household” per year.<sup>27</sup> Most lawsuits in the central courts concerned defaulted bonds of debt.<sup>28</sup> Debtors were imprisoned on *mesne* process while awaiting trial, and, if the principal and interest could not be extracted from their property through distraint, then creditors could choose

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<sup>24</sup> Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 125.

<sup>25</sup> Baker provides a keen account of the way literary critics tend to hone in on Muldrew’s more optimistic claims about the culture of credit. He advises us to “read both with and against the grain of this historian” (66). For Baker’s full discussion of Muldrew, see 62-80.

<sup>26</sup> For a study of wide-ranging socio-economically induced affective responses, see Leinwand, *Theater, Finance, and Society*.

<sup>27</sup> Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 236.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 205.

to imprison them indefinitely on *capias ad satisfaciendum*.<sup>29</sup> Because long-term imprisonment prevented debtors from repaying their debts and often resulted in sickness or death, the practice was portrayed by critics as malicious.<sup>30</sup> Though total numbers of imprisoned debtors from year to year are unclear, the prolific complaint literature against the practice that developed in the seventeenth century and the repeated promulgation of Debtors Insolvency Acts, which released poor debtors worth £10 or less, both suggest that imprisonment for debt was a significant social problem.<sup>31</sup> For early modern audiences, then, Antonio's default, imprisonment, trial, and the threat his vengeful creditor poses to his life would have struck a familiar chord.

Just as early modern economic practices must be understood with respect to the affections that pervade them, revenge is a prominent affective response that sometimes finds its expression in economic language and forms. The homology between revenge and debt—"paying back" in both senses—appears in most cultures throughout history.<sup>32</sup> In medieval Christendom the institution of wergild brought revenge and economics even closer by giving the loss of life and limb a monetary value in the form of compensation.<sup>33</sup> Medieval and early modern Christian paradigms of divine vengeance, specifically the satisfaction theory of atonement, figured Christ's death as payment for a debt humankind could not pay. We know revenge was a popular dramatic

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<sup>29</sup> See Muldrew, *Economy*, 288-289. A *capias ad satisfaciendum* ("take to satisfy") is a writ of execution that enables a defendant debtor's body to be arrested until he or she can satisfy, through repayment or penalty, the plaintiff creditor.

<sup>30</sup> Leinwand observes that the anonymous author(s) of the 1622 debtors' petition, *A Petition to the Kings most excellent Maiestie*, represents such creditors as motivated by a desire to humiliate their debtors rather than the hope of repayment (*Theater*, 75).

<sup>31</sup> See Muldrew, *Economy*, 286-290.

<sup>32</sup> See Atwood 148-61 and Graeber 127-64. Bailey's essay "*Timon of Athens*, Forms of Payback and the Genre of Debt," *English Literary Renaissance* 41.2 (2011), is organized around this homology.

<sup>33</sup> Marc Shell and Luke Wilson both read *Merchant* with reference to the institution of wergild and related forms of blood money.



theme in early modern England, and Linda Woodbridge has argued that this popularity was directly linked to the context of pervasive indebtedness and general economic injustice.<sup>34</sup>

Though it might be going too far to suggest that separating Shylock's revenge from his economics constitutes a false dichotomy, it is fair to say that one cannot be fully understood without respect to the other. We tend to accept this in the case of Antonio and Bassanio's friendship, keeping in mind Lorna Hutson's definition of early modern male friendship as "an economic dependency as well as an affective bond."<sup>35</sup> Once we understand that enmity, as well as the oft-cited and discursively prominent ideal of amity, underwrote early modern economic relations, we can discern how Shakespeare's comedy assesses the sociability of Christian debt.

### **Interest, Free Lending and Adventuring**

*The Merchant of Venice* most directly represents Christian lending practices as free lending and adventuring, which were linked in early modern discourse and practice to interest. Antonio's free lending is first described when Shylock confesses in an aside that he hates the merchant "for he is a Christian;/ But more, for that in low simplicity/ He lends out money gratis, and brings down/ The rate of usance here with us in Venice" (1.3.37-40). Antonio says as much of his lending practices just before he asks Shylock for a loan with usury: "albeit I neither lend nor borrow/ By taking nor by giving of excess,/ Yet to supply the ripe wants of my friend/ I'll break custom" (56-59). Both statements indicate that Antonio does not engage in usury as a lender nor (typically) as a borrower; however, neither statement rules out interest as an economic form we should associate with Antonio.

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<sup>34</sup> See Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 84-105.

<sup>35</sup> Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

Counter-intuitive though it may be to us, interest and free-lending were not mutually exclusive in the anti-usury discourse contemporary to the play. Indeed, the two were often spoken of together since it was the free lending of the creditor that merited the payment of interest from the debtor if default occurred.<sup>36</sup> The Civilian, one of the interlocutors in Thomas Wilson's popular dialogue *A Discourse Upon Usurye* (1572), provides a case in point when explaining why interest is just: "I do *freely* lend money to my friend, for five months, with this condition, that if he do not pay me the said money at the time, he shall pay unto me such damages as I shall sustaine for default of his payment" (emphasis added).<sup>37</sup> The Civilian insists he lends "freely," for he lends without contracting to profit monetarily from it. If the principal were repaid on time, he would profit only in having helped his "friend." Anti-usury literature is full of reminders akin to Wilson's that "God ordeyned lending for mainteauce of amitye, and declaration of love, betwixt man and man."<sup>38</sup> It is for this reason that some "recompence" is warranted when the friend does not repay the Civilian on the appointed day. The debtor's payment of interest was simply the "right" thing to do in a Christian framework of reciprocal obligations – a Christian courtesy, we might say.

Thus, though Antonio may lend and borrow money "gratis," early modern audiences would have understood that in the case of a default, there would be the option of pursuing interest. In early modern England, where there were no Jewish usurers, merchants were most commonly the moneylenders because of their store of coin. The crown's creditors were typically merchants, and R.H. Tawney suggests it was due in large part to this increasingly powerful class

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<sup>36</sup> Wilson, *A Discourse Upon Usurye* (London, 1572), fol. 129. Jones traces back to Thomas Aquinas the notion that a lender lending freely was entitled to compensation if loss resulted from the loan (*God and the Moneylenders*, 10).

<sup>37</sup> The Civilian describes the extrinsic title of *damnum emergens*, interest compensating the debtor for losses incurred as a result of the loan. Under the extrinsic title of *poena conventionalis*, failure to repay on time is sufficient cause for compensation, whether or not it led to loss for the lender.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, *A Discourse*, fol. 95.

that the *Act Against Usury*, which legalized interest, was instated.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Wilson's Ockerfore faults merchants for holding the crown to the repayment of loans during difficult times, to which the Merchant responds, "[w]e lend not for usurie, but for interest, and by exchange, and I thinke no man can disallowe eyther interest or exchange."<sup>40</sup> So when Shylock charges that Antonio "was wont to lend money for a Christian courtesy" (3.1.41), we might understand this to indicate true interest as well as his amicable relations with the young gentleman Bassanio.<sup>41</sup>

As a merchant adventurer, in particular, Antonio would have been able to claim the extrinsic title of *periculum sortis*, a claim to interest specific to risky ventures. As a form of gainful lending, adventuring was distinguished from usury in part by its benefit to the commonwealth. As Wilson's Preacher concedes, "Lawfull trading and adventuring to bring in our want and to carry out our plenty hathe ever beene allowed, and without suche traffique no countreye, nor kingdom can floryse."<sup>42</sup> The high risk of adventuring further distinguished it from the easy security of usury.<sup>43</sup> Risk imbued adventuring with the moral value of other Christian affective lending practices since the merchant adventurer presumably took on this risk for the good of the common weal and the well-being of his friend-partners to whom his interest was

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<sup>39</sup> See Tawney 156-59. The 1571 Act was preceded by a Henrician statute in 1545 (37. Henry. 8), which first legalized interest up to ten percent until 1552, when it was repealed (5.Ed.6). Elizabeth's 1571 *Act Against Usury* (13. Elizabeth.c. 8) reinstated the Henrician statute by emphasizing the distinction between "interest" and "usury." For a discussion of these statutes and the debates surrounding them, see Jones 47-65.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, *A Discourse*, fol. 58.

<sup>41</sup> Auden also recognized the merchant Antonio's associations with interest (66-67). Leinwand has suggested that in Bassanio's initial confession of indebtedness to Antonio—"Nor do I now make moan to be abridg'd/ From such a noble rate" (1.1.126-27)—we might read "a barely veiled request that Antonio adjust the interest rate he charges on loans to gentle, 'noble' men like Bassanio" (16).

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, *A Discourse*, fol. 6.

<sup>43</sup> See MacInnes 39-55 and Nerlich 55-60.

joined.<sup>44</sup> Mosse contrasts the adventurer who “lendeth . . . desirous to know how the borrower shall speed” with the usurer who lends instead “being assured afore hand what himself shall gain” (54). This legitimizing risk entitled parties invested in ventures to *periculum sortis*.

Kerridge explains how this form of interest worked:

The clearest example of this was in bottomry . . . where the shipowner or master paid anything between 30 and 50 per cent, but the lender lost all his principal and any hope of interest if the ship and its cargo were lost. Under the title of *periculum sortis*, the greater the risk of ultimate default on the principal, the higher the justifiable rate of interest. Since the risk could be infinite, no theoretical limit could be put on the rate of interest, and up to 300 per cent or so might rightly be charged. (11)

Thus, as a merchant adventurer, Antonio would have been linked to some of the highest allowable rates of interest. This could well account for why it is that after his ships are lost, Antonio’s “creditors grow cruel” (3.2.315), as he describes in his letter to Bassanio, despite their being Christian lenders (we presume) and not usurers. Interest was then vital to the play’s most professed and most visible Christian lending practices, free lending and adventuring, a fact we lose altogether when we contrast these practices to the usurer’s charging of “interest.”

### **Interest and Usury – Separate but Equal**

In the play, *interest* is treated as a distinctly Christian term. There are five instances of the word in the text; four of them appear in act 1, scene 3, when Antonio solicits Shylock for the loan. In his initial aside upon seeing Antonio, Shylock tells us that the merchant has previously railed on him in the marketplace for “my bargains, and my well-won thrift—/which he calls interest” (43-46). Shylock has already identified his own lending practices as “usance” (40). Here he refers to his business and profits as “my bargains, and my well-won thrift.” But when he adds *interest* to the lending lexicon, the word is specifically attributed to Antonio: “which *he* calls interest.” *Interest* is Antonio’s word, not Shylock’s. The tendency is to read “interest” in

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<sup>44</sup> Risk began to be conceived as a legitimate claim to interest in the mid-fifteenth century; see Jones 11.

this exchange as denoting “usury,” a viable reading since we know from Mosse that the words were “confounded in our common use of speech.” However, I suggest that Shylock’s disavowal of the word *interest* invites us to consider a reading of it here as that lawful practice we have seen emphatically distinguished from usury. The implication of Shylock’s statement, then, might be that the usurer’s “thrift” is no different, in spirit or effect, from the lawful practice Christians call “interest.”

Even as he asks Shylock for a usurious loan, Antonio attempts to distinguish himself from Shylock fiscally and morally: “albeit I neither lend nor borrow/ By taking nor by giving of excess,/ Yet to supply the ripe wants of my friend/ I’ll break a custom” (1.3.56-59). Shylock mocks Antonio’s hypocrisy: “Methoughts you said you neither lend nor borrow/ Upon advantage” (65-66). This taunt is sharpened if we understand that Shylock may be taking issue with not only Antonio’s exception, but also with the claim that true interest is somehow not lending and borrowing “upon advantage.”<sup>45</sup> Antonio’s defensive response supports such a reading: “I do never *use* it” (67, emphasis added); in other words, “Well, I don’t take *usury*.”

Shylock responds by recounting the Jacob-Laban story from Genesis, which he appears to offer as scriptural justification for his usury. Antonio’s reactions to Shylock’s notably ambiguous exegesis further suggest that a debate concerning their respective practices underlies this exchange between Christian and Jew. Antonio interrupts Shylock’s introduction of Jacob’s lineage and birthright with a preemptive, and defensive, guess at the story’s significance: “And what of him? Did he take interest?” (1.3.71). Shylock again disavows the word as Antonio’s: “No, not take interest, not, *as you would say*,/ Directly interest. Mark what Jacob did” (72-73,

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<sup>45</sup> See Lars Engle, “Money and Moral Luck in *The Merchant of Venice*.” *Shakespearean Pragmatism: Market of His Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Engle reads this exchange as suggestive of Antonio’s emotional interest. He suggests that “Shylock turns Antonio’s ‘excess’ into the much more general ‘advantage,’ thus including the kinds of emotional return we have seen Antonio take from Bassanio earlier in the act” (87).

emphasis added). Critics differ in their readings of how Jacob's streaking of the wands before the breeding sheep correlates with early modern conceptions of usury, or why it is that Shylock chooses this of all possible scriptural bases for the practice.<sup>46</sup> What *is* clear is what Antonio makes of the story:

This was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for—  
A thing not in his power to bring to pass,  
But swayed and fashioned by the hand of heaven.  
Was this inserted to make interest good,  
Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams? (1.3.87-91)

What Shylock presumably puts forward as a scriptural pattern for usury, Antonio reads instead as a pattern for venturing, his own business practice, legitimated as we have seen by the risk that trusts the shared interests of cooperative partners to “the hand of heaven.” With this interpretation, Antonio attempts to turn Shylock's parable to the service of his own practices. Shylock's reference to generation is not lost on Antonio, however, and the merchant places their respective interpretations, and practices, side by side, one legitimate, the other unnatural: “Was this inserted to make interest good,/ Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?” (90-91). If “interest” here denotes usury, then the two interpretations are redundant. Antonio's question makes more sense if “interest” refers to a practice distinct from usury. It follows, then, that Antonio's question might read along these lines: “Did you intend to prove my lending practices good (because, as I interpret it, that is what you have done), or are you talking about usury, in which case, ‘[t]he devil can cite Scripture for his purpose’ (1.3.94)?” Antonio's question supports a reading of “interest” as a distinctly Christian practice separate from usury throughout the scene, revealing a debate in which Shylock accuses Antonio by pointing to the similarity of

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<sup>46</sup> See, for instance, Engle 87-92 and Shell 48-55. Holmer has noted that the only extant sixteenth-century text that associates the Jacob-Laban story from Genesis with usury is Mosse's *The Arraignment and Conviction of Usurie* (1595).

their lending practices, while Antonio defensively insists on their difference. Shylock's decision to pursue his vengeance by adopting something like Antonio's lending practices in his loan to the merchant follows this debate: "This kindness will I show" (1.3.139).

Reading "interest" as true interest rather than usury in the exchange highlights the way Christian Merchant and Jewish Usurer are defined against one another even as their similarities are suggested. Discussing their shared religious foundations, James Shapiro describes this relation of difference and sameness: "Jews were at once the opposite of Christians and at the same time potential Christians" (7). A similar dynamic held, I suggest, for their respective economic practices. Christian lenders were at once the opposite of usurers and at the same time potential usurers.<sup>47</sup> The play's positioning of Shylock and Antonio as at once dichotomous and parallel mirrors this relationship.<sup>48</sup> Though they are enemies representing presumably conflicting social worlds, religions, and economic practices, the two characters' similarities are hard to miss, a sameness emphasized by Portia's much noted question upon entering the trial scene: "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.169). Both are defined in Venetian society by their economic functions. Both interpret the Jacob-Laban story as justification for their respective livelihoods, finding in the same pattern a model for their purportedly different business practices. As dramatic characters, both are out of sorts with their comic emplotment. Antonio's perverse movement toward self-destruction, his solitary position outside of the marriage bond at the play's conclusion, and the homoerotic nature of his love for Bassanio all link him to the character of

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<sup>47</sup> English moneylenders were also often described as or compared with Jews since "Judaism" was treated as a synonym for usury; see Hawkes 67-71.

<sup>48</sup> For relevant readings of the parallel between Shylock and Antonio, see Rene Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991), 246-55 and Engle 87-92.

Shylock and homologically to conceptions of usury as unnatural generation, or as Mosse writes, “a kinde of Sodomie in nature.”<sup>49</sup>

I have noted the ways anti-usury literature marked true interest as different from usury, but these same tracts were sensitive to its potential to be quite similar to usury in practice. An anonymous anti-usury tract titled *The Death of Usury* (1594) describes a common strategy by which lenders gave their debtors a short window for repayment in order that the principal might *not* be repaid on time:

Most of these common, or rather cunning Usurers, are come to this passe, because the law alloweth no usurie, they will put in no use in their bonds, but leave it to the courtesie of the borrower, if he giveth use they will take it, if none, they will note him another time when he standes in neede, and for this cause, because they are doubtfull of mens dealings, they will not put forth their money above 3 moneths, that the borrower can hardly make any profitable returne of it in so short time.<sup>50</sup>

Loans contracted for short periods like the three months given here (and the three months of Shylock’s and Antonio’s bond) were likely to default since borrowers had little time to profit from the funds borrowed, increasing the lender’s likelihood of being able to collect a penalty. Anti-usury writers describe this unexpressed anticipation of gain as “mental usury.”<sup>51</sup> They warned of this and other forms of “cloaked” or covert usury that appeared to conform to the law as well as legitimizing Christian affections, but were usurious nonetheless in their biting nature. Wilson’s Civilian complains of the cloaked usurer that “he undoth as many as he dealeth with all under the color of amity and law.”<sup>52</sup> The Preacher similarly laments that “under the colour of

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<sup>49</sup> Mosse, *The Arraignment*, 110. For the link between usury and sodomy, see Hawkes 161-65.

<sup>50</sup> *The Death of Usury* (London, 1594), 25.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, Wilson fol. 22, and Mosse 62-68.

<sup>52</sup> Wilson, fol. 96.



freindshippe, mennes throtes are cut.”<sup>53</sup> When Bassanio fears Shylock’s intent in lending freely to Antonio, Shylock insists it is “[t]o buy his favour I extend this friendship” (1.3.163-64). Like the anti-usury literature’s “cloaked usurer,” Shylock uses Christian lending’s legitimizing claims to sociability to cloak the destructive passions that motivate his lending, calling attention to the dangers of lawful lending and questioning the moral distinctions drawn between his usury and true interest. In this way, to those social evils Shylock reflects back to his Christian counterparts—revenge and slavery—we might add true interest, as well as the debt litigation and imprisonment that often resulted when debts went unpaid.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Dangers of Affective Lending**

We can read Shylock’s bond with Antonio as an example of the play’s Christian model of lending not only because Shylock evokes the language of “kindness” in proposing it but also because the bond itself is consistent with the play’s Christian economic forms. The bond depends upon the condition of interest, it is an example of “free” lending, and it is a venture:

This kindness will I show.  
Go with me to a notary, seal me there  
Your single bond, and, in merry sport,  
If you repay me not on such a day,  
In such a place, such sum or sums as are  
Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit  
Be nominated for an equal pound  
Of your fair flesh to be cut off and taken  
In what part of your body pleaseth me. (1.3.139-47)

Shylock’s proposed bond fits Muldrew’s description of this common instrument of lending:

“Bonds were a much more secure form of lending, and took the form of either writings, or bills, obligatory, which had to be written in proper legal form. They were often drawn up by a lawyer

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, fol. 38.

<sup>54</sup> For Shylock on revenge, see 3.1.55-61, on slavery, 4.1.89-99.

or scrivener, and then signed and sealed by two witnesses, and many had penal clauses.”<sup>55</sup> When Shylock asks Antonio to “seal me there your single bond,” he is foregoing the practice of having witnesses, in addition to the borrower, sign the bond, a gesture that implies trust and contributes to Antonio’s sense that Shylock “grows kind,” but that also limits the potential exaction of damages, expressed in the penal clause, to Antonio’s purse and person alone. As we have seen, Muldrew insists that “interest was always charged on bonds,” and Shylock’s fictional bond is no exception. Shylock here describes the standard formulation for *poena conventionalis*: “If you repay me not on such a day,/ In such a place, such sum or sums as are/ Expressed in the condition,” then a forfeit, or penalty, will be taken. And yet because this penalty is conditional, because it will only come due upon default, the loan is an example of free lending, and, as we have seen, conceptually it is kindness rather than profit that motivates such lending.

Because risk is the affective-economic form most valued by the play’s Christians, Shylock’s claim that he names a pound of the merchant’s flesh as the bond’s penalty “in merry sport” appeals to Antonio as both a venture and a friendly gesture. After all, Bassanio uses a similar strategy when proposing his risky get-out-of-debt scheme to Antonio: “In my schooldays, when I had lost one shaft/ I shot his fellow of the selfsame flight/ The selfsame way, with more advised watch,/ To find the other forth; and by adventuring both/ I oft found both. I urge this childhood proof/ Because what follows is pure innocence” (1.1.140-45). Like Bassanio’s “childhood proof,” Shylock’s “merry sport” casts dangerous lending practices as amicable play, a game of risk among friends. Indeed, Antonio receives Shylock’s proposed penalty as such: “Content, in faith. I’ll seal to such a bond,/ And say there is much kindness in the Jew” (1.3.148-49). The “kindness” Antonio sees in Shylock stems from the kindness, or similarity, of his

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<sup>55</sup> Muldrew, *Economy*, 109.

proposed bond to the merchant's own preferred economic forms, and the kindness implied in sharing his risk and interests.

And yet it is Antonio's default, not his success, on which Shylock ventures. Contrary to Woodbridge's reading of the bond as a "win-win situation" for Shylock,<sup>56</sup> if Antonio's ships return, Shylock will gain nothing: no revenge, no usury, and no interest. However, as Shylock explains to Bassanio, "[Antonio's] means are in supposition" (1.3.14). If "lands rats and water rats, water thieves and land thieves ... the peril of waters, winds, and rocks" (1.3.19-21) should intervene and prevent Antonio from keeping his day, then Shylock will reap the profit of a presumably lawful revenge. Like Antonio, Shylock leaves his risky venture to be "swayed by the hand of heaven" (1.3.89). Indeed, when he learns from Tubal that Antonio's ships have all miscarried, Shylock's response attributes the merchant's "ill luck" to the heavens: "I thank God, I thank God!" (3.1.86). Thus, in pursuing his revenge, Shylock exchanges his usual lending practices for those associated with Antonio and the Christians of the play. In this way, the play's criticism of lawful lending moves beyond its comparison to usury to dramatize dangers specific to its affective basis.

In the Christian model of lending, Shylock finds a lawful vehicle for his vengeance, and this is so because there is destructive potential in the legitimizing affective framework that accompanied such acts of lending. Because lawful lending practices understood creditor and debtor to be joined by true interest, default was an injury to the goodwill of the creditor and a failure of the trust between creditor-friend and debtor-friend. However, in its presumption about the ideal nature of the emotive relationship between creditor and debtor, this legitimizing framework served as a screen for any number of less-than-ideal passions motivating debt relations. This same presumption explains why the law gave creditors so much power over their

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<sup>56</sup> Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama*, 103.

debtors. It was expected that this power would be used according to the spirit of Christian love that presumably motivated lending in the first place. As Muldrew documents, sometimes default *was* met with remarkable charity and mercy—and sometimes it was not. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* dramatizes the challenges posed by the latter situation. What happens when a creditor pursues his lawful penalty in a spirit of malice or vengeance rather than Christian love and mercy? We might ask the same question in terms long employed by readers of the play: what happens when a creditor invokes the letter of debt law in a manner that runs contrary to the spirit of debt law?

Early modern lending engaged the language of friendship while litigation and penalties were often undertaken in quite another spirit. Philip Henslowe's diary attests to this in the very terms employed by the play: "when I lent I wasse a friend & when I asked I was unkinde."<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, early modern complaint literature concerning the unkindness of hard-hearted creditors focuses on the common practice of imprisoning debtors.<sup>58</sup> As we have seen, common law allowed creditors to distrain a debtor's goods and rents, and statutory law gave creditors power over the debtor's body.<sup>59</sup> A debtors' petition relates the terms of the law: "And the words of the Statute are, that if hee have no goods or chattels, or not enough to satisfie the whole, his body shall be Imprisoned for the rest."<sup>60</sup> Once damages were awarded, a creditor could choose to

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<sup>57</sup> Walter W. Greg, *Henslowe's Diary*, Vol. 2 (London: A.H. Bullen, 1904–08), 144.

<sup>58</sup> For others who read the pound of flesh with relation to imprisonment, see Shell and Bailey, "Shylock and the Slaves." Bailey's discussion focuses on the discursive association between indebtedness and slavery (11–14).

<sup>59</sup> Anselment notes that the legislation dates back to Edward I's reign in the late thirteenth century with a statute that granted merchants the power to detain their debtors. The action of debt was extended further between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, allowing sheriffs to seize debtors for court with a writ of *capias ad respondendum* and creditors to hold their debtors for the duration of their suit and thereafter with a writ of *capias ad satisfaciendum* (2). See also Muldrew 287.

<sup>60</sup> *A Petition to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, the Lords Spirituall and Temporall, and Commons of the Parliament now assembled, Wherein is declared the mischiefes and inconveniences, arising to the King and Common-wealth, by the Imprisoning of mens bodies for Debt* (London, 1622), 13.

imprison the debtor indefinitely if the value of the damages could not be taken from the debtor's goods. Presumably the hope was that friends and family would pay the debt and damages in exchange for the debtor's liberty.<sup>61</sup> However, debtors were often left in prison long after it became clear no such payment would come. Long-term imprisonment not only prevented debtors from earning money to repay their debts and provide for their families but also threatened their lives through exposure to the poor conditions of early modern prisons.<sup>62</sup> The debtors' petition describes imprisonment as "a corporall punishment, a griefe and torture of the minde: A long and lingring dying; and sometimes a short killing by plague."<sup>63</sup> (12). The creditor's right to imprison a debtor was easily abused. Muldrew writes that this recourse "was meant to be used with discretion and charity, but if a creditor was unscrupulous or malicious there was really nothing to stop him from uncharitably exerting his will against another individual's body" (289). Samuel Cottesford's published sermon on the subject, *A Very Sovereigne Oyle to Restore Debtors* (1622), depicts the perceived malice of such creditors: "[b]ut what say many of these greedy cormorants, It shall cost me more than my debt, but I will have him; I care not so much for my money, as that I may have the will of the villaine: Now I have him, he shall lye by it, I will have his skin, I will make Dice of his bones?"<sup>64</sup> The choice to imprison a debtor, then, often meant relinquishing any hope of repayment in exchange for the satisfaction of bodily punishment—a choice akin to Shylock's in pursuing a pound of Antonio's flesh.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See Muldrew 261-62.

<sup>62</sup> See Muldrew 288-290. Muldrew describes how poor sanitation and "gaol fever" sometimes led to prisoners dying before the completion of their trials (288). See also Hawkes 150-55 and Anselment 1-2.

<sup>63</sup> *A Petition*, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Cottesford, *A Very Sovereigne Oyle to Restore Debtors* (London, 1622), A3.

<sup>65</sup> Hawkes also suggests that *Merchant's* pound of flesh corresponds to the practice of imprisonment for debt (152).

Identifying Shylock's pound of flesh with the practice of imprisoning debtors finds its basis in anti-usury discourse. Here, classical punishments for usurers and debtors were often referenced. Wilson's Civilian provides an apt example:

For whosoever failed of paying his debt and usury, the first day of the new moon ... the party uppon an execution, was by and by taken and bound with a cord and so committed to prison, there to live and rotte, ... and so he lived in that misery, till he died. *Septimus Florens* reporteth, yf one man were a debtour to many, hys body was geeven unto them, to bee equally cut in peces, and whereas he had not to paye in hys purse, hys quartered body should paye for all, to geve a terror to others, how to breake with their creditours, & as thys was amongst the Romaynes, so the Grecians used the same.<sup>66</sup>

Imprisonment proceeds, in this example, to the division of the debtor's flesh amongst his creditors by the underlying logic that the debtor's body must pay for what his goods and estate cannot. England's own laws enabling creditors to imprison their debtors operated by this same logic: the debtor's body stood as collateral for the debt. This is not to suggest that Shylock's strange alternative penalty of a pound of his debtor's flesh is consistent with early modern English lending practices, lawful or otherwise, but rather that the pound-of-flesh trope resonates powerfully with the imagery used in complaints against the practice of imprisonment and anxieties concerning malicious creditors. In anti-usury discourse, "historical" examples like the one above merge with folkloric imagery of usurers consuming their debtors' bones, denigrating the cruelty of the contemporary practice of imprisonment for debt and perpetuating myths about Jewish criminality in one fell swoop.<sup>67</sup> Thus, reading the pound of flesh as a reference to debt's penal code need not counter its associations with the threat of circumcision and castration.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Wilson, fol. 157.

<sup>67</sup> Auden notes, "[t]he pound of flesh story has a basis in historical fact for, according to the Law of the Twelve Tables, a defaulting debtor could be torn to pieces alive" (67).

<sup>68</sup> See especially Shapiro 119-30 and Adelman 108-14.

However, we might rethink the often recited dichotomy posed by Cohen when he declares that the pound of flesh is “closer to folklore than to capitalism.”<sup>69</sup>

Once all of Antonio’s ships miscarry, leaving him unable to keep the bond’s appointed day of repayment, the merchant is arrested and Shylock pursues the penalty of his bond. It is worth noting here that Shylock’s claim to interest may be twofold. Antonio has not kept his appointed day of repayment, enough to entitle Shylock to interest under *poena conventionalis*. However, Shylock might also claim interest under the title *damnum emergens* (emergent loss) since the money Shylock lent Antonio for Bassanio was in turn borrowed from his tribesman Tubal. Antonio’s default potentially endangers Shylock’s ability to repay his own loan, which underscores Tubal’s interest in what news the Rialto offers concerning Antonio’s fortunes and the whereabouts of Jessica with all those ducats.<sup>70</sup> Shylock’s desire for revenge, and his case for pursuing his interest, has only been sharpened by Jessica’s theft, elopement, and flight with a Christian husband. When Salerio reasons with Shylock concerning the bond—“Why, I am sure if he forfeit thou wilt not take his flesh./ What’s that good for?” (3.1.43-44)—he makes plain his intention: “If it will feed nothing else it will/ feed my revenge” (45-46). Shylock’s motivations are clear, and yet the singularity of his malice is somewhat undermined by the fact that he is not the only creditor of Antonio’s to seek satisfaction. In his letter to Bassanio, Antonio describes his troubles in a telling sequence: “Sweet Bassanio, my ships have all miscarried,/ my creditors grow cruel, my estate is very low, my bond to the/ Jew is forfeit” (3.2.314-15). Antonio’s forfeit of the bond is described as the end result of a chain of events that involves the cruelty of other creditors, Christian creditors. The rumors circulating the Rialto have not affected Shylock alone, for there are many who share an interest in Antonio’s ships. The merchant’s imprisonment, then,

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<sup>69</sup> Cohen, “The Merchant,” 769.

<sup>70</sup> See *Merchant* 3.1.65-108

could as easily be by the suit of these “cruel” Christian creditors. The play makes Shylock one of a number of creditors pursuing their interests against Antonio’s financial ruin in a “cruel” manner, though it is Shylock’s bond that most concerns Antonio “since in paying it, it is impossible I should/ live” (3.2.316-17).

The play’s trial scene anticipates the developing complaint literature concerned with the imprisonment of debtors. We know from Muldrew’s work that debt litigation had already reached its peak in the 1590s when the play was first composed and performed.<sup>71</sup> By the early 1620s, there was an explosion of petitions from imprisoned debtors appealing to King James and Parliament to intercede on their behalves against “the extreame oppressions of our merciless Creditors.”<sup>72</sup> Muldrew writes that the severity of the law and the fear of punishment it induced were necessitated by the proliferation of defaults, leaving “merciful forgiveness” (290) as the only solution to the problem of lengthy imprisonment under life-threatening conditions.<sup>73</sup>

The play’s emphasis on the necessity of Shylock’s mercy raises problems similar to those this developing discourse highlights. When Shylock’s suit comes to trial, he demands his penalty and stands on the lawfulness of his bond: “And by our holy Sabbath have I sworn/ To have the due and forfeit of my bond./ If you deny it, let the danger light/ Upon your charter and your city’s freedom” (4.1.35-38). The Duke cannot plead Antonio’s case despite his desire to do so, for such an intervention would undermine the law of contract that the commerce of Venice depends upon. Antonio explains as much to Solanio: “The Duke cannot deny the course of law,/ For the commodity that strangers have/ With us in Venice, if it be denied,/ Will much impeach the justice of the state,/ Since that the trade and profit of the city/ Consisteth of all nations”

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<sup>71</sup> Muldrew, 3.

<sup>72</sup> *A Petition*, ii.

<sup>73</sup> Muldrew, 290.



(3.3.26-31). The office of mercy falls to Shylock, but the Duke can only urge him to it: “How shalt thou hope for mercy, rend’ring none?” (4.1.87).

That mercy is presented as the only recourse for the legal quandary these Christians find themselves in suggests the difficulty presented by debt laws that grant the creditor so much power over the debtor. This is particularly so in a realm dependent upon “the commodity that strangers have/ [w]ith us.” The Duke’s formulation for mercy echoes the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “And forgive us our dettes, as we also forgive our detters” (*Geneva*, Matt. 6.9-13).<sup>74</sup> Portia, as Balthasar, similarly urges “the Jew” to grant mercy with reference to this most central Christian prayer in the quality of mercy speech: “We do pray for mercy,/ And that same prayer doth teach us all to render/ The deeds of mercy” (4.1.195-97). As presented in the trial scene, then, mercy is a culturally inscribed affective ideal that the law depends upon, another manifestation of the Christian love presupposed by true interest.<sup>75</sup> Both Portia and the Duke insist upon Shylock’s participation in this code, even as they express his position outside of it: “Then must the Jew be merciful” (4.1.177), and “We all expect a gentle answer, Jew” (4.1.33). Shylock does not conform to the ideal: “I am not bound to please thee with my answers” (4.1.64). Antonio attributes Shylock’s mercilessness to “his Jewish heart” (4.1.79). Shylock insists it has as much to do with his humor: “You’ll ask me why I rather choose to have/ A weight of carrion flesh than to receive/ Three thousand ducats. I’ll not answer that,/ But say it is my humour” (4.1.39-42). Both claims draw out the implications that Shylock’s resistance to

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<sup>74</sup> All biblical citations are from the Geneva Bible. Matthew’s Paternoster was used as the liturgical version, and the English rendering of the Greek (οφειλήματα and οφειλέταις) was “dettes” and “detters” in the Great Bible, the Bishops Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the King James (as opposed to Luke’s alternate version, which was generally rendered as “sinnes” and those who are “indebted” to us or “tresspasseth” against us).

<sup>75</sup> Citing a 1605 MS titled “Treatise on Usury” attributed to Walter Howse (Oxford, Bodleian, Rawlinson MS D.677, p.8), Jones describes the position that a binding contract between debtor and creditor ensures that justice and mercy will be observed in lending. Because a contract allows a creditor to pursue the law against a delinquent debtor, it also offers the opportunity for a creditor to extend mercy, “for if the debtor repents of delinquency the lender is bound by the golden rule to give a chance to repay before allowing the law to take its stern course” (156).

mercy carries for early modern English audiences. To borrow Janet Adelman's formulation, Shylock functions here not as "the stranger outside Christianity but the original stranger within it" (4). Though less ethnically and religiously diverse than Venice, London was a place where anti-immigrant sentiment abounded during the 1590s.<sup>76</sup> Like anti-Semitic discourse, the language of humors was a vocabulary of differentiation and strangeness used by the English to understand ethnological differences as well as the varied and inconstant temperaments associated with Englishness.<sup>77</sup> Shylock defends his vengeful humor with reference to the diversity of affections: "Some men there are love not a gaping pig,/ Some that are mad if they behold a cat,/ And others when the bagpipe sings i'th' nose/ Cannot contain their urine; for affection,/ Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood/ Of what it likes or loathes" (4.1.46-51). The early moderns knew that the affections, as well as cultural inscriptions, motivated responses. For this reason, debt law could no more assume mercy in Christian England than in cosmopolitan Venice.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, just what constitutes mercy with respect to civil debt is unclear. In the play, the Duke urges Shylock to carry out the fifth petition literally and "not only loose the forfeiture,/ But, touched with human gentleness and love,/ Forgive a moiety of the principal" (4.1.23-25). We might expect this to track with expressions of the cultural ideal in early modern England. Surely the language of the Lord's Prayer ("And forgive us our dettes, as we also forgive our debtors") posed a challenge to the creditor pursuing his interest against a debtor.<sup>79</sup> Yet in the

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<sup>76</sup> For a study of attitudes toward immigrants in early modern London and how they shaped ideas of "Englishness," see Selwood.

<sup>77</sup> See Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 48-86.

<sup>78</sup> On a related note, Hawkes suggests, "If in one sense early modern Christians conceived of everyone as a 'brother,' there was another sense in which they were coming to regard everyone as a 'stranger'" (65).

<sup>79</sup> See Leinwand 74-75. Leinwand discusses Matthew 6:12 in order to highlight the disconnect between affective responses to debt in a theological context, which elicits humiliation in the debtor and, in turn, the charity of

period's many expositions of the Lord's Prayer, the fifth petition is commonly examined in light of the contemporary problem of debt in a manner that frees Christian creditors of this dictate in the case of civil debt. For instance, William Perkins's *An Exposition of the Lords Praier* (1592) resolves the difficulty by distinguishing "debt that is civill, and comes by lawfull bargaining" from "hurtes and damages; which are done unto us in our bodies, goods, or good name,"<sup>80</sup> essentially the difference between "debts" and "trespasses." Perkins reassures Christian creditors who might have been wondering "[w]hether may a man aright pray this petition, and yet sue him at the law, who hath injured him." His answer: "[y]ea, for a man may in an holie maner sew another for an injury: and as a souldier in lawful warre may kill his enemy, and yet love him: so may a man forgive an injurie, and yet seeke in a Christian maner the remedie."<sup>81</sup> Yet Perkins's surprisingly permissive stance includes a caveat: that the litigant seek remedy "in a Christian maner." For Perkins, this entails several conditions, primary among them, "[w]e are to take heed of all private revenge and inward hatred, which if we conceive, we doe not forgive."<sup>82</sup> For Perkins, then, Shylock's suit offends by means of the affect that motivates it. Litigation and penalties may lawfully and righteously follow lending, Perkins insists, but they should proceed in the same spirit of Christian love that renders such lending lawful in the first place.

In the trial scene, both the Christians and Shylock recognize the role destructive passions play in his suit against Antonio. Antonio speaks of Shylock's "envy" (4.1.9), "fury" (4.1.10), and

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forgiveness, and debt in a socio-economic context, which Leinwand describes as eliciting instead indignity at "status infringement"(75) on the part of the debtor. Leinwand's discussion suggests that though debtors appealed to debt's theological context, particularly in the petitions of imprisoned debtors, "their impetus was a juridically and socio-economically inspired sense of affront" (75).

<sup>80</sup> Perkins, *An Exposition of the Lords Praier* (London, 1592), 129-130.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*. Perkins's other conditions are that law is the last resort, that the suit is undertaken to maintain "godly peace" and to bring the offender to repentance, and that the litigant's actions are not scandalous to the Church. Shylock's suit clearly fails on all these counts, but most significantly with regards to Perkins's first concern.

“rage” (4.1.12) as motivating emotions. Shylock acknowledges “a lodged hate and a certain loathing/ I bear Antonio” (4.1.59-60) as reason for pursuing his “losing,” or unprofitable, suit (4.1.59-61). Alongside this affective language, however, Shylock expresses his vengeance as a strict adherence to justice: “I stand for judgement” (4.1.102) and “I stand here for law” (4.1.141). As Portia admits, the law upholds the letter of Shylock’s penal clause: “And lawfully by this the Jew may claim a pound of flesh” (4.1.226). Shylock’s suit places Venetian law in the awkward position of being in accord with his vengeance, and Shylock’s answer to Portia’s quality of mercy speech serves as an oblique reminder of the close association between divine vengeance and mercy.

Barbara Lewalski has observed that Shylock’s response—“My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,/ The penalty and forfeit of my bond” (4.1.201-2)—echoes the Jewish crowd in Matthew’s account of Christ’s trial: “[t]hen answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt. 27.25).<sup>83</sup> The allusion evokes the crucifixion, widely understood in the period through the view of atonement as “satisfaction.”<sup>84</sup> The debt relation between Shylock, Antonio, and Bassanio mimics the structure of satisfaction theory in which God’s just vengeance requires the bodily suffering and death of Christ as recompense for humankind’s transgression, figured as an unpaid debt. According to satisfaction theory, this debt cannot simply be forgiven because this would violate God’s “essential nature,”<sup>85</sup> an abstraction closely

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<sup>83</sup> Lewalski, “Biblical Allusion and Allegory in *The Merchant of Venice*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13.3 (1962), 338-340.

<sup>84</sup> For good discussions of the satisfaction view of atonement with relation to early modern economics and *Merchant*, see Forman 11-16 and 30-42, Leinwand 74-75, and Stallybrass 279-82.

<sup>85</sup> Timothy Gorrige, *God’s Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence, and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 94.

related to (and developed alongside) theories of retributive justice.<sup>86</sup> Rather, God accepts Christ's voluntary sacrifice to satisfy the debt. This vengeance and sacrifice express and enable Christian love and mercy, conjoining these destructive passions and idealized affections within Christian constructs of debt and justice. Shylock's vengeance and Antonio's self-sacrifice enable instead a nearly successful revenge plot. As Valerie Forman observes, revenge and redemption collapse into one another with the pound of flesh, which stands as "a perversion of the ideal of Christian redemption into a narrative of revenge."<sup>87</sup> I suggest that *Merchant's* criticism of lawful lending practices locates this perversion within true interest's legitimating framework of Christian love that enables "just" vengeance. The Christian model of "kind" lending, then, is the logical beginning to a plot seeking a lawful corporal revenge.

### **From "Trew Interest" to Self-Interest**

Christian lending practices and the affective ideals that legitimate them are roundly problematized in *Merchant*. Shylock is not the only character motivated by destructive passions. The relationship between Antonio and Bassanio is the play's primary example of Christian amity and courtesy, but in its excess, it turns to destructive ends. Antonio encourages Bassanio, a self-professed prodigal, to solicit Antonio for another loan in a manner that invites self-ruin: "My purse, my person, my extremest means/ Lie all unlocked to your occasions" (1.1.138-39). Antonio's love is such that his debtor's need is the merchant's command: "Then do but say to me what I should do/ That in your knowledge may by me be done,/ And I am pressed unto it" (1.1.157-59). The language explicitly inverts their roles as creditor and debtor, since it is

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 22, 92-95.

<sup>87</sup> Forman, *Tragicomic Redemptions: Global Economics and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 35.

typically the debtor who is “pressed” by his creditor.<sup>88</sup> The precarious state of Antonio’s finances suggests just how ill-advised his lending to Bassanio is.<sup>89</sup> Antonio confesses his financial limitations: “Thou know’st that all my fortunes are at sea,/ Neither have I money nor commodity/ To raise a present sum” (1.1.177-79). Regardless, Antonio agrees to fund Bassanio by taking on the debt himself: “Therefore go forth—/ Try what my credit can in Venice do; That shall be racked even to the uttermost/ To furnish thee to Belmont to fair Portia” (1.1.177-82). Antonio’s language portends his own bodily suffering, which will indeed be racked “to the uttermost” to furnish Bassanio. That the merchant must turn to Shylock, his enemy and a usurer, rather than a fellow Christian merchant only further suggests the difficulty of Antonio’s financial situation. When Antonio defaults, other creditors pile on, indicating that the merchant is already stretched to the limit when Bassanio solicits him. It is because Antonio’s love dangerously binds him to his friend’s desire in the first place that he ends up dangerously bound to his enemy’s revenge.

Anti-usury literature is full of warnings about lending practices that were destructive, or biting, for debtors, but it also warned potential lenders and suretors about the dangers of incautious lending. William Burton’s treatise *A Caveat for Suerties* (1593) addresses the specific concern of whether or not a Christian should stand suretor for another, as Antonio does for Bassanio’s debt.<sup>90</sup> Though Burton describes suretyship as “a dutie both Christian and necessary” and modeled by Christ, he also describes it as a potentially self-destructive practice, in which

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<sup>88</sup> Engle has described the inverse debt relation between Antonio and Bassanio as resembling “that between Citibank and Zaire, whereby the creditor, by the magnitude of the investment, becomes the thrall of the debtor, who can cause ruin by defaulting on or repudiating the debt” (83).

<sup>89</sup> Antonio’s cash flow and credit problems have been noted by Engle (80-81) and Bailey (“Shylock and the Slaves” 14).

<sup>90</sup> For an excellent discussion of attitudes toward surety, see Lim, “Surety and Spiritual Commercialism in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Studies in English Literature* 50.2 (2010), 368-75.

“many in a vaine vaine to be counted kindhearted, ...do feed others till they starve themselves, they save others from drowning and sinke themselves, they discharge others and charge themselves [...].”<sup>91</sup> Burton attempts to draw a line between fulfilling the Christian duty of love and undoing oneself: “[a]nd God would not have thee to helpe thy neighbor without any care to save they selfe: for although he hath said Love thy neighbor as they selfe, yet he never said love thy neighbor better then thy selfe[...].”<sup>92</sup> Burton’s treatise recognizes the destructive ends that may result from a love that exceeds some measure of self-preservation and self-love: “[f]or if thou be not able to performe that which thou hast promised for an other man, then thy person must answere the matter in prison, . . . and therefore in regard of thy person, take heed what thou does promise, lest thou become a murtherer of thy self.”<sup>93</sup> Burton’s treatise attempts to carve out a space for self-preservation in amicable lending practices by validating some measure of self-love, or self-interest—characteristics often associated with the anti-social usurer.<sup>94</sup>

Antonio’s ill-advised suretyship is the sort of self-destructive act against which Burton warns. Luke Wilson argues that in Antonio’s actions the play’s Christian ethic of risk is shown to be “obscene, narcissistic, and perversely self-destructive”—the merchant’s failure to insure his ships in the first place is “not only masochistic but antisocial too.”<sup>95</sup> Antonio’s self-description as “a *tainted* wether of the flock/ meetest for death” (4.1.113-14) calls attention to the

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<sup>91</sup> Burton, *A Caveat for Suerties* (London, 1593), 24, 56-57.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>94</sup> Jones attributes a similar idea to Howse’s manuscript: “[r]ather than believing that ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ demands selfless action, he sees it as licensing the lender to be as selfish as the borrower. Unless the borrower and the lender benefit jointly from a loan it is inequitable” (Jones 158).

<sup>95</sup> Wilson, “Monetary Compensation,” 33.

unproductive, rather than Christ-like, quality of his sacrifice.<sup>96</sup> Antonio is “meetest for death” because of his place outside the play’s affective economy of production—that is, marriage. Like Shylock’s vengeful pursuit of justice, Antonio’s “tainted” self-sacrifice presents an uncomfortable corollary to the satisfaction model of atonement, further aligning the play’s destructive passions with those Christian affective ideals that legitimate true interest. Prodigal sacrifice is a tendency of Christian amity in the play, an extension of the Christian value of risk, or hazarding all. Even as Antonio sacrifices himself for his prodigal friend, Bassanio and Graziano rhetorically sacrifice their wives on the altar of Christian amity: “Antonio, I am married to a wife/ Which is as dear to me as life itself/ ... / I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all/ Here to this devil, to deliver you” (4.1.277-82). Shylock finds in the sentiment little to commend Christian affections: “These be Christian husbands” (4.1.290). Portia agrees—“Your wife would give you little thanks for that” (4.1.283)—and in this response, we might imagine the origin of the ring trial that follows. Portia’s management of her marriage bond with Bassanio offers a counterpoint to the play’s problematization of affective debt relations. By retaining something like Burton’s self-preserving self-love, Portia is able to direct the play’s various debt relations away from their potentially destructive ends.

The play’s fifth and final use of the word *interest* appears in a domestic context, when Bassanio, newly betrothed to Portia, welcomes his Venetian friends to Belmont: “Lorenzo and Salerio, welcome hither;/ If that the youth of my new *interest* here/ Have power to bid you welcome. By your leave,/ I bid my very friends and countrymen,/ Sweet Portia, welcome” (3.2.219-23, emphasis added). Here, Bassanio’s use of “interest” denotes his title to property, specifically “this house, these servants, and this same myself” (3.2.170), which Portia gives him

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<sup>96</sup> Leinwand suggests that Antonio’s choice to enter into the bond might be seen as a death wish, a step toward “the impossible integrity of interestlessness” (18).



with the ring. It also references his claim to the privileges that attend ownership: in this case, the right to welcome his friends to Belmont as its lord and master. However, like any other creditor entering a legal bond, Portia retains her own interest in the titles she lends Bassanio, and she enters the bond on condition of his fidelity to certain terms: “I give them with this ring,/ Which when you part from, lose, or give away,/ Let it presage the ruin of your love,/ And be my vantage to exclaim on you” (3.2.171-74). Portia’s “vantage to exclaim on” Bassanio is akin to true interest; if Bassanio breaks trust by failing to meet the condition of the bond, Portia can justly exact a penalty. In this way, the play’s marriage bond appears similar to its debt bond, so similar, in fact, that as Bassanio prepares to confess to Portia that he has given the binding ring away, he imagines compensating for this default with a penalty of flesh: “Why, I were best to cut my left hand off/ And swear I lost the ring defending it” (5.1.176-77).

Unlike Shylock and Antonio, however, Portia enters her bond with equal measures of affection and pragmatic self-interest. Though Portia prefers Bassanio to her other suitors, and even dotes on him as the casket trial approaches, at the moment of his choosing, Portia reins in her affections: “O love be moderate! Allay thy ecstasy./ In measure rain thy joy; scant this excess./ I feel too much thy blessing: make it less,/ For I fear I surfeit” (3.2.111-14). In moderating her passion, Portia seeks to disentangle and balance her affection and interest, even as she lends both, along with all she possesses, to Bassanio.<sup>97</sup> Preceding the casket trial, Portia struggles with this balance: “One half of me is yours, the other half yours—/ Mine own, I would say, but if mine, then yours,/ So all is yours. O, these naughty times/ Puts bars between the owners and their rights;/ And so, though yours, not yours” (3.2.16-20). Afterwards, however, Portia organizes her marriage bond’s emotive and economic capacities in complementary and

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<sup>97</sup> Korda has emphasized Portia’s role as a creditor in the play, as one who lends rather than one who gives and is given.

discrete clauses: “Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear” (3.2.312). In this way, Portia negotiates a model for affective debt relations akin to Burton’s model for suretors seeking to fulfill the Christian duty of love without sacrificing themselves.

Portia uses the ring trial to train Bassanio to this new model of interest. When he explains that “courtesy” (5.1.216) and “honor” (5.1.217) would not allow him to refuse the civil doctor his wedding ring, Portia positions his legitimating affections against his self-interest:

Let not that doctor e’er come near my house.  
Since he hath got the jewel that I loved,  
And that which you did swear to keep for me,  
I will become as liberal as you.  
I’ll not deny him anything I have,  
No, not my body nor my husband’s bed.” (5.1.222-27)

Portia uses the specter of her own sexual liberality and infidelity to pit Bassanio’s self-interest against those affective tendencies that begin with amicable courtesy and end with destructive sacrifice. Bassanio, whose only wealth runs in his veins, has a vested interest in Portia’s faithfulness.<sup>98</sup> As with the debt bond, the body still stands as collateral for trust, but it is the threat of lost productivity (the profits of the marriage bed) rather than corporal punishment and destruction that motivates him. Portia protects her own interest by reminding Bassanio of what he stands to lose if either violates their bond. In this way, Portia anticipates a pragmatic conception of individualized interest that differs from the ideal we have seen defined (against usury) by its basis in universal Christian love.<sup>99</sup> By identifying in the private sphere of Belmont

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<sup>98</sup> See Merchant 3.2.253-254.

<sup>99</sup> I have in mind Engle’s description of Shakespearean pragmatism in which fixed systems are re-described as dynamic economies (7). Portia’s use of self-interest against the destructive passions anticipates the doctrine of interest described by Hirschman. For Hirschman, the relatively innocuous passion of “interest,” conceived broadly as calculated self-love and over time more specifically associated with “the pursuit of material, economic advantage” (38), came to be understood in seventeenth and eighteenth century political thought as a wedge between the destructive passions and ineffectual reason.

the particular interests of herself and Bassanio, Portia employs a pragmatic self-interest against those destructive passions that pervade affective debt relations. For all the play's careful parsing of vengeful usurer and sad, sacrificial merchant through the framework of true interest, it is the self-interested Portia who proves to be the play's harbinger of modern capitalism.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Reading the Unkind Household in City Comedy

In the early seventeenth century, the city comedy began to dramatize contemporary urban culture in the terms of pervasiveness new economic forms and practices and the social transformations they threatened to enable.<sup>1</sup> These plays share a set of character types, stock tropes and plots, many of which are defined by their relationship to debt. There are usurers and creditors, young prodigal gallants and apprentices, rich widows, upwardly mobile Citizens and their lovesick daughters, shopkeepers and their unfaithful wives, sheriffs and gaol keeps, servants of varying degrees of loyalty. Prodigals invariably take center stage, moving up and down the social hierarchy, from inheritance to mortgages, to the Counter and the Hole, to the restoration offered by a rich widow, or their own wits. Characters are driven by self-interest in pursuit of credit and money and the pleasures they underwrite, social advancement, or love. The

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<sup>1</sup> L.C. Knights famously insisted that none of the plays written in the Jacobean period are “dramatization[s] of an economic problem or consciously intended as propaganda for this or that form of economic organization, and only a few of them . . . are meant to make the audience think about questions of social morality” (qtd. in Leinwand, 15). Brian Gibbons reminds us that “In Elizabeth’s reign New Men were not new. Capitalism was not nascent” (*Jacobean City Comedy*, 33). Alexander Leggatt reminds us that “financial trickery” was a conventional trope of Roman New Comedy which playwrights of city comedies imitated, but acknowledges that “[t]he age-old plot devices are seen in terms of contemporary social conditions, and are made part of a sardonic commentary on greed and social climbing in the London of Middleton’s day” (10). For Douglas Bruster, much of early modern drama, not just those plays we designate as city comedies, were concerned with what he calls the “materialist vision of the English Renaissance” (38). He defines this variously as “a historically determined pattern of concern with the social order and its relationship to material life” and “the collective focus of many dramatists on the essence of the physical world and its often demanding claims upon the foundations of urban existence” (38). Bruster goes on to suggest that “playwrights sought to reconcile the social tensions inherent in the economic base of England’s evolving society through an explication of the new forms of social transactions” (40). Jean E. Howard writes, “At the theater Londoners encountered fictions that directly addressed the conditions of social change and dislocation occurring around them” (2), noting that “the stage focused with particular intensity on the economic and commercial aspects of the city’s expansion” (12).

tangled pursuit of self-interest within the city tends to sort itself in such a way that most characters end up burned by their aspirations (especially overreaching usurers), while a few (usually the young and the clever) manage to realize the possibilities of this new world: duping their usurer or their beloved's disapproving father, or both, since these are often the same character.

With this chapter, I identify and examine two related conventions of city comedy that depend upon debt's interrelated emotive and economic structures. First of all, I describe the unkind households of city comedy, in which domestic and familial relationships are rewritten and reorganized to function primarily according to the logic and ethos of economic obligation rather than the affective ties that traditionally underwrite such relations. Usurers are uncles who take advantage of their nephews' riot to steal their patrimonies.<sup>2</sup> Debtors' relatives no longer recognize their kinship. Fathers align themselves with stranger-suitors against their daughters and sons. Apprentices, servants, and masters change places as fortunes rise and fall. Debt and usury function not only as the mechanisms motivating these reorganizations, but also as models for broken or false households, domestic arrangements designed to satisfy lust and monetary needs, or to deceive impatient creditors. These plays dramatize a confusion over who is "kind" and who "strange" and describe their "unnatural" relations in the language of predatory appetite and bestiality.

Secondly, I examine the debtor-protagonist's ability to successfully navigate these confused relations, rather than fall prey to them, through a deft discernment of the relationship between economic and emotive obligations within his milieu. Typically critics have focused on

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Brissenden notes that one meaning of the word "uncle" was to "cheat or swindle" (1).

role-playing, improvisation, self-fashioning, and wit as the skills celebrated by the genre.<sup>3</sup> To these I would add the particular ability to shift between economic and emotive obligations, both in rhetoric and practice. The clever protagonists of these plays are good readers of debt and the way other characters use its overlapping discourses and relations. They achieve their own economic and affective ends by out-manipulating their creditors and competitors around these confused and conflated relations, even as they strike some kind of balance between economic and emotive obligations that recognizes the importance of satisfying both. Indeed, in each of these plays, the debtor-protagonist ultimately triumphs as a result of temporarily placing an affective obligation above his economic motivations or by pursuing economic ends through affective cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance Angela Stock and Anne-Julia Zwierlein's discussion of this convention of the genre in the introduction of *Plotting Early Modern London*, 9-11.

<sup>4</sup> City comedy arose as a genre alongside city pageants and masques. The two genres suggest an emerging urban self-consciousness. City comedies, of course, went the satirical route and focused on the city's appetites and vices. The term "city comedy" was used for the first time by R.C. Bald in a 1934 article titled "The Sources of Middleton's City Comedies." Brian Gibbons first described city comedy as "a distinct genre with a recognizable form, style, and subject-matter" (*Jacobean City Comedy*, 1968, 1980, 1). Gibbons suggested that with the genre, dramatists "articulated a radical critique of their age. They dramatized conflicting forces in the confused development from the England of Elizabeth towards the Civil War" (4). In Middleton's city comedy especially, Gibbons finds an ambivalence towards the vice he satirizes and little insistence on conventional morality even when it is present and coincides with comedic form (89). This ambivalence gets noted by later critics of the genre as well. Alexander Leggatt concludes his study of the genre by arguing that "the assertion of morality and the subversion of morality are the poles between which citizen comedy moves" (150). Leggatt finds that though often conventional morality is upheld when "the interests of the individual and of society are finally identical," sometimes "the wit and flair" with which cheaters seek their private gain appeals to audiences instead (150). Furthermore, Leggatt finds that the genre's primary concern is with "social relations in their most material form – sex and marriage, money and property" and that, due to this focus, the morality of the genre "is finally a morality of property and possession" (151). Gail Kern Paster has described city comedies as a response not only to the social changes of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean London, but to "a larger awakening of interest, comparable to Renaissance civic humanism, in the idea of 'the City'" (*The Idea of the City*, 1985, 7). Her study focuses on the doubleness of the city – as ideal community marked by creativity on the one hand, and as predatory trap marked by fratricide on the other (3). She locates this doubleness in Middleton's city comedies through the irony that involuntary community and reciprocity are a part of the predatory cycle due to limited resources and the comedic rule that the biter will get bit (222). Paster too finds ambivalence to be the most consistent response to representations of the city in city comedy (11). Theodore Leinwand followed with a study of the genre that insisted readings focused solely on literary conventions or on the plays' satirical quality are not sufficient. Leinwand's focus is on the ways "[t]he City at once interprets and constitutes the comedy as the comedy represents and fashions the City" (*The City Staged*, 5). He organizes the study according to the relationships amongst what he sees as the genre's "paradigmatic social triangle" (8) – merchants/citizens, gentry/gallants, and wives/whores/widows/maids (7) – suggesting that "[t]he performance on the stage both parodies and refracts the actual social role" (10) and that with these exaggerated stereotypes, these plays

Reading the plays in this way suggests that while the device of manipulating economic relations by exploiting affective ties was a popular one that enjoyed some appreciation among theater audiences as a skill of wit and survival in depictions of the predatory city, there was also a desire to balance such economic savvy with some authentic satisfaction of affective ties. It is impossible to say whether this stemmed from the audience's desire to see affection beat predation at its own game, or from the imperative of comedic form to contain subversive threats.<sup>5</sup> However, keeping in mind Theodore Leinwand's insistence that city comedies not only parodied existing conditions in the city but also did their part in fashioning them,<sup>6</sup> I suggest that this tendency among city comedy debtor-protagonists thrust into the changing economic and social conditions of Jacobean London the idea that honoring affective ties could actually prove

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capture not just vices but help to crystallize attitudes towards these types and vices" (12-13). Douglas Bruster has suggested that though the designation of city comedy as a subgenre was useful at one point in generating a focus on the social and political aspects of early modern drama, the designation has lost its usefulness. His critique argues that the "institutionalization" of the subgenre has led to a problematic focus on place, which Bruster is interested in replacing with a "a concern with material life which underlies the themes and structures of the drama" (30). Bruster calls this concern "the materialist vision" (*Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare*, 30). Like Leinwand, Jean E. Howard is interested in the interplay between the city of London, with its changing social and economic realities, and the stage, however, where Leinwand is interested in how these plays helped construct and interpret social types, Howard is interested in how they do this for particular places in the city: the Royal Exchange, the Counters prisons, bawdy houses, and dancing academies. Howard's study identifies its collection of plays as "London plays" rather than "city comedies" because she wants to include plays beyond those satiric plays so often associated with the latter term (*Theater of a City*, 19-20). Howard's study documents both the "material changes overtaking London" and the "discursive changes and struggles necessary to make cognitive and ideological sense of the city" (14).

<sup>5</sup> In his study of citizen comedy, Leggatt suggests that the comic form can be "a useful instrument of social analysis. Comedy normally moves towards harmony and social integration at the end – a marriage, a public celebration, the restoration of lost property – and our interest is held throughout by the battle against the selfish, anti-social characters who get in the way of this ending. The social issue of the use and misuse of wealth fits neatly into this pattern – so neatly that the results are often automatic and predictable" (31). While I agree that comic form is a factor in the moral distinction drawn between debtor-protagonists and their fellow economically-motivated characters, I think the distinction is more subtle and less neat than Leggatt suggests here. The debtor-protagonist's own complicity in the "misuse of wealth" should not be overlooked. Ultimately, Leggatt concludes that "[t]he comic form is broad enough to support a wide range sympathies, and the happy ending can be a triumph for the social bond and the responsibilities that go with it, or . . . for the witty individual who is concerned only with his own pleasures" (53). This chapter finds instead that, in the plays considered here, sympathies fall with characters who are able to strike a balance between the two.

<sup>6</sup> Leinwand argues, "Social context informs genre, and genre, or dramatic form, impinges on history, thus organizing, ordering, and plotting the social conflict that is a constant outside the theater" (6).

beneficial to one's economic well-being. This marks a subtle but important distinction from the more conventional notion that dramatic gestures to affection, particularly the ideal of Christian love, functioned simply as conventional condemnations of the economic motivations so bound up in the vices of satiric representations of the city.

I begin with readings of three textbook city comedies: Thomas Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* and *A Chaste Main in Cheapside*, followed by J. Cooke's *Greene's Tu Quoque*. Each of these plays exemplifies the convention of the unkind household I describe above and centers on a protagonist who successfully navigates unkind relations among kith and kin to ultimately triumph in both love and money. Following these readings, I will turn to two plays that do not strictly fit the genre of city comedy,<sup>7</sup> but that contain many of the genre's defining ingredients: debt plots with all their stock characters and a similar concern with affective relationships turned unkind by an economic ethos: Thomas Heywood's chronicle history, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part 2* and Philip Massinger's comedy *A New Way To Pay Old Debts*. I turn to these two plays because they expand the depiction of unkind affective relations beyond the domestic and familial to those vertical relations of stewardship, service and loyalty up and down the social hierarchy. These two plays express a conservative and nostalgic concern for what happens when the desire and means for social mobility attending the new economics threaten reciprocal hierarchical ties that structure the traditional social order.

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<sup>7</sup> Brian Gibbons first distinguished the genre from other Jacobean comedy "by their critical and satiric design, their urban settings, their exclusion of material appropriate to romance, fairy-tale, sentimental legend or patriotic chronicle" (11). Heywood's play is a patriotic chronicle, Massinger's has a country setting, so both would be excluded from his definition. Alexander Leggatt's study, however, includes both. His focus on "citizen comedy" offers a looser definition of the genre. He begins by identifying it as "comedy set in a predominantly middle-class social milieu" (1), used "to dramatize broad social issues that do not depend on class only," especially money and sex, noting that it "cuts across a variety of comic modes: . . . the satiric, the didactic, and the simply amusing, with everything from lightweight farce to pieces that verge on domestic drama" (4). Leggatt sees a direct line of descent from chronicle plays to the citizen comedy, and sees Heywood's *If You Know Not Me* as intentionally combining the features of chronicle and citizen comedy. He argues, "Heywood's play, in fact, is ostensibly a chronicle, but it has grown into a citizen comedy, retaining appendages of its former state" (8). Massinger's *A New Way To Pay Old Debts* is included in Wendy Griswold's 1986 collection of city comedies, *Renaissance Revivals: City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre, 1576-1980*.



Importantly, these two plays take us into the country – *If You Know Not Me*, briefly, and *A New Way*, for the entirety of the play. Here we see how the debt plots of city comedy, and the skills of versatility and clever manipulation that make for city comedy heroes, play differently when removed from the context of the city.

### **“Unnatural” and “Unkind” Households in City Comedy**

Brian Gibbons observed that “Middleton’s satire focuses on those characters for whom all human relationships are conceived of in terms of financial contract.”<sup>8</sup> In city comedies, the economic and legal instruments of credit that underwrite social mobility and predatory appetites, such as a bond of obligation, or a writ obligatory, outweigh affective and familial bonds and obligations, such that the “natural” order of social relations is overturned and rewritten in a manner that is represented as perverse and discordant – an uncle robbing his nephew of his patrimony, parents choosing the fraudulent presentations of strangers over the true inclinations and affections of their children, bachelors creating false households with bawds and prostitutes, cuckolds welcoming their wives’ lovers, gentlemen competing to court and marry cast-off whores, servants betraying masters, queens not knowing their creditor-subjects and city creditors not knowing their country debtors, villainous usurers being received at a table that turns away a down on his luck gentleman and friend, the daughters of usurers being waited on by the daughters of nobles he impoverishes.

City comedies are often built around prodigal son plots in which a young man lives a profligate existence for some time, falls (typically quite literally into the Hole of debtors’ prison),

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<sup>8</sup> Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, 129.

repents and then, often, finds redemption of some sort.<sup>9</sup> The prodigals of city comedy might begin the play at any stage along this trajectory. Some are still early yet in their profligacy, some have long since fallen and the play enacts their path to social and financial redemption. The former are foolish characters, rarely sympathetic; the latter are clever, the wiser for their fall, and we root for them as they climb their way out of the Hole, outsmarting their heartless usurers and creditors, often winning (by hook or crook) the hand of a beloved along the way. Of course where there are prodigals, there will be usurers and creditors. Usurers occasionally appear as the anti-social, isolated, miserly, and miserably rich figures from anti-usury discourse (evoked most famously by Shylock). However, the usurers of city comedy are as often represented as more integrated members of the city, with open households, families, and active social relations. Sometimes usurers are also fathers to the beloved of their ruined prodigals. Sometimes they are uncles to their ruined prodigal nephews. It is here, in the relationships between these stock characters and the many city associates and within these stock plots, that city comedies examine what happens when affective relations within the city, particularly within and among households, are underwritten by money and self-interest rather than familial affection and obligation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Leggatt notes that continental plays with a prodigal son theme were an important antecedent for the genre. See pp.33-53.

<sup>10</sup> Gail Kern Paster has discussed the idea of the city as taking on two opposing forms in literature: “the city as a visionary embodiment of ideal community (either on earth or in heaven) or the city as a predatory trap, founded in fratricide and shadowed by conflict” (*The Idea of the City*, 3). Paster suggests that this latter form, which city comedies adopt, has its basis in part in the origin stories of cities, in particular the notion that Cain founded the very first city, and Rome was founded by Romulus, both killers of their brothers (10). Thus, the notion of unkind and unnatural domestic and affective relationship appears to be already intimately linked to the idea of the city.

### *A Trick to Catch the Old One*

Thomas Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (~1605-07) is a typical city comedy with all the usual suspects and plotlines.<sup>11</sup> Among the city comedies examined here, it is distinctive in its representation of relationships between usurers, particularly Lucre and Hoard, once friends turned enemies, whose avarice is outdone only by their enmity for one another. The three year old dispute began when Lucre swooped in on a "bargaine" that Hoard had lined up for himself. The characters' first appearance on stage takes the form of a near brawl in which they rehearse their long standing quarrel. Lucre justifies his action with an ethos of self-interested competition: "was't not any mans case? Yes, will a wise-man stand as a Bawd, whilst another wipes his nose of the bargaine, no, I answer no in that case" (1.3.13-14). Hoard returns with the obligations of friendship: "Was it the part of a friend: no, rather of a Jew" (16). Hoard, himself a usurer, describes Lucre's actions as those of "a cunning Usurer" (20), to which Lucre queries how his friend-enemy can say such things in good conscience "without any impeachment to thy self?" (25). Hoard's rejoinder, which sticks with Lucre for the duration of the play, is to confront Lucre with his "unnatural" dealing of his own nephew:

Thou that canst defeate they owne Nephew, *Lucre*, lap his lands into bonds, and take the extremity of thy kindreds forfeitures, because hee's a rioter, a wast-thrift, a brothel-maister, and so forth – what may a Stranger expect from thee, but *Vulnera delacerata*, as the *Poet* says, delacerate dealing?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Leinwand says otherwise. For him, *A Trick* is a play about other 'power of money' plays. He writes, "The traditional play is brought back to life to be seen for what it is. The foolishness, combined with the tired, old-news quality, of city comedy's characters and plots invites us to pause and notice the ways we imprison one another in inflexible social roles. The patterned, artificial business on stage suggests forcibly the plotted character of the ways men and women typecast one another on the streets" (59). Leinwand and Leggatt before him make much of the fact that the play was written for the private theater, as opposed to *A Chaste Maid* which was written for the public theater. Though this context and audience was not a primary consideration in my reading, I find little in the text to suggest that this context had a major impact on how the genre's typical tropes and plotlines get deployed.

<sup>12</sup> Dilacerate (v)- to tear asunder, to tear in pieces (OED). The adjective form of this word fits with imagery common to in anti-usury discourse in which usurers either calculatedly divide a debtor's body amongst themselves or more ravenously tear it to pieces. We will see a scene of the latter variation in *Timon of Athens*.

Though Hoard is far from possessing any moral authority within his play, he articulates here a concern shared by all of the plays this chapter treats. When the affective bonds and obligations of kinship do not override the self-interest and desire driving the new economics, what will social relations and society look like? Lucre defends his part in his nephew's ruin by shifting the fault onto the young man's profligacy: "'tis he must lye by't, what's this to me?" (35). In his moment of self-righteousness, Hoard manages to put his finger on the problem: "What's all to thee? Nothing, nothing; such is the gulfe of thy desire, and the Wolfe of thy conscience" (37-8).

Hoard's concise diagnosis calls to mind a more famous account of the same problem on a grander scale:

. . . O when degree is shaken,  
Which is the ladder to all high designs,  
The enterprise is sick. How could communities,  
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,  
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,  
The primogenity and due of birth,  
Prerogative of age, crowns, scepters, laurels,  
But by degree stand in authentic place?  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets  
In mere oppugnancy. . .  
. . . Strength should be lord of imbecility,  
And the rude son should strike his father dead.  
. . . Then everything includes itself in power,  
Power into will, will into appetite;  
And appetite, an universal wolfe,  
So doubly seconded with will and power,  
Must make perforce an universal prey,  
And last eat up himself. (1.3.101-24)

Shakespeare's Ulysses specifies "degree," or rank, as the key to a functioning society and imagines the violence and destruction that would follow if that structure fell away. Shaking the structure of degree is the business of city comedy. These plays dramatize anxieties and fantasies of social mobility with all of its chaos and irreverence. Few if any characters in these plays are

not complicit in shaking things up, and yet in the comedic trajectories of these plays, there remains a respect for some adherence to degree in the form of acknowledging the obligation to satisfy certain affective ties. So even as city comedy revels in shaking the structure of degree, it ultimately condemns what Gail Kern Paster has described as the “predatory appetite” prevalent in its depiction of the city.<sup>13</sup>

Paster writes of both Middleton’s and Ben Jonson’s city comedies that they offer an “image of urban society in the sway of natural law as predatory appetite. In such a city, the idea of community means that each character defines place only in terms of his self-interest. The members of this community have ties not to each other, but only a direct tie of self-interest and survival to the city itself.”<sup>14</sup> My readings of these city comedies too see these predatory appetites as the prevailing force in the city, but for my purposes, the residual affective ties between characters remain important, both because they provide opportunities and fodder for self-interested manipulations, and because they offer the occasional opportunity to transcend this predatory cycle. Paster discusses “the impersonal operations of the predatory cycle” and in doing so has in mind the very exchanges I here deem “unkind” and “unnatural” precisely because they estrange those who should be tied by affection.<sup>15</sup> However, I want to avoid discussing these relations in terms of their “impersonal” nature because the exploitation of affective ties is so

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<sup>13</sup> Paster, *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 152.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Paster does later go on to emphasize the way Middleton’s city comedies present a sense of community and interdependent relationships. For Paster the interdependence of these relationships is the result of limited resources. Characters must get what they can from one another, and because possession is always temporary in the predatory cycle, the characters in the play are bound together by this involuntary sharing of resources (land, money, whores, wives, etc.) Paster describes this community or fellowship as “ironic” and “perverse” (155-169).

essential to these operations. These operations are all the more unkind precisely because they depend on and betray that which is personal.<sup>16</sup>

Both Ulysses's speech, and Hoard's brief assessment of Lucre's swindling of his nephew, use the image of the Wolf to describe this appetite that is responsible for the lost sense of obligation to degree and the affective ties that underwrite it. Throughout Middleton's two city comedies discussed here, and in his debt-tragedy collaboration with Shakespeare *Timon of Athens* which I will turn to in the final chapter, bestial and predatory language is used to describe "unnatural" and "unkind" social relations in which appetite for economic gain and social mobility bankrupt affective ties that uphold social order.

In *A Trick Witt-good*, Lucre's prodigal nephew, is most often the mouthpiece for these bestial aspersions, being, after all, the primary target of the play's various usurers and creditors. When we meet him, with the opening lines of the play, Witt-good is far along in the prodigal narrative: "All's gone! Still thou'rt a Gentleman,/ that's all; but a poore one, that's nothing" (1.1.1-2). His name and opening speech signal that he is a prodigal of the sympathetic sort: post-fall and somewhat repentant, poised to outwit his cruel usurers. Witt-good first sets up the play's preoccupation with economic cruelty among kin, when he refers to usurers as "these old Foxe-braind – and oxe-browde Uncles" who defend their avarice by pointing to the follies of young nephews: "*Hee that doth his youth expose,/ To Brothell, drinke, and danger,/ Let him that is his nearest Kinne,/ Cheate him before a stranger*" (1.1.15-18). Witt-good insists it is "a principle in Usury" that these cheating kin be the prodigal's "Uncle" (19). But it is not "that olde Foxe mine

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<sup>16</sup> It is important to note, however, that the depersonalization of economic transactions is a much discussed feature of the early modern economy. In particular, Howard reminds us of Jean-Christophe Agnew's description of the emerging " 'placeless market' in which participants were unknown to each other and transactions were conducted through middlemen using new financial instruments such as bills of exchange or other forms of credit" (Howard 13). However, with the exception of a few transactions of this sort in *You Know Not Me 2*, (the Barbary sugar transaction and the Queen's agent requesting a loan from Hobson), however, this type of transaction is not what is being represented in these plays. Rather the transactions very specifically occur between agents with personal affective ties, or between strangers feigning to have such ties, or trying to create them through marriage or sex.

Uncle” (1.1.80) alone that Witt-good brands with a bestial nature. His former mistress, “the secret consumption of my purse,” he names a “round webd Tarantuala” (1.1.29-32). In the common parlance of anti-usury tracts, Witt-good names the play’s paragons of the anti-social, miserly usurer, Dampit and Gulfe, “Cater-pillar[s]” (1.4.6-7), and his creditors, including Cock-pit, “beasts” (4.3.43). The city, where Witt-good fears to go lest his creditors descend and he suffer arrest, is full of animals more likely to meet kinship with cozenage than love.

And yet, the city is where Witt-good must go or else lose “a Virgins love, her portion and her Vertues” (1.1.21-2). From the get-go then, Witt-good’s economic redemption is intimately tied to affection. To climb out of the hole that his Uncle, and his own vice-ridden ways, have led him to, he must marry for both love (or regard for virtue) and money.<sup>17</sup> Witt-good’s dowried, virtuous beloved is Joyce, also (as the gods of city comedy would have it) the niece of Hoard, his usurer-uncle’s usurer-frenemy. True to his name, Witt-good concocts a scheme to return to the city in a manner that places him in the good graces of his many creditors and especially his usurer-uncle. As is often the case with comedic prodigals, Witt-good has a country mistress he needs to marry off now that he has reached the redemption-by-marriage stage of the narrative. “Curtizan,” as she is named throughout the play, will accompany him to the city adopting “the name of a riche Widdow, and foure hundred a yeare in good earth” (1.1.84-5). With the enlisted

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<sup>17</sup> Leinwand notes the cultural basis for the genre’s consistent equation between sex and money: “Throughout our period, marriage remained an institution designed to keep the male line intact, and to secure monetary or political advantage. Men continued to secure monetary or political advantage. Men continued to think of love as a duty of the already married, not as a prerequisite of marriage. . . Marriage was always a serious *business*, and Elizabethan and Jacobean drama that made much of the sex-money equation was only exaggerating the assumptions that underpinned marriage in every social class” (145). Bruster too observes this tendency in the drama of the period: “The commodification of the personal marked the drama of this period with new energy. Women were more often portrayed as commodities, with marriage frequently seen as a middle-class transaction, one which could remain financially profitable well after the ceremony and the exchange of dowry” (42-43).

help of a country Host who has a vested interest in the prodigal's prosperity, Witt-good equips them sufficient to appear solvent and spreads the rumor that he is soon to marry this rich widow.

With this device, Witt-good expects to “conjure up a kinde of Usurers love” in his Uncle, for he knows well “the state of an old mans affection”: “if his Nephew bee poore indeed, why hee letts God alone with him,/ but if hee be once rich, then heele bee the first man that helps him” (1.1.86-93). In Witt-good's description of how this works, kinship ties are only recognized where there is the potential for profit. Witt-good's conception of “a kinde of Usurers love” demonstrates his keen discernment of how kinship ties have been rewritten by the predatory appetites of the city, and his scheme is designed to take advantage of the motivations behind this “Usurers love.” Uncle Lucre responds with just such a love once he hears the report of his nephew's potential prosperity. He immediately promotes his nephew's good name, denies rumors that his lands are mortgaged to an “uncle so unnaturall” (2.1.114-15), sends for Witt-good and faults him for his “Unkindness” in being a “Stranger” to his house (2.2.214, 224). But a “Usurers love,” or the temporary alignment of his interest with another's for the purposes of personal profit, only extends to the day of reckoning. Lucre's efforts are motivated by the payday he imagines when Witt-good marries the Widdow Medler (Curtizan's alias) and is once again ripe to be cozened of his new wife's wealth and lands. Because Witt-good understands the economic motivations behind his uncle's lip service to their kinship ties, he manages to appear naively duped by this “Usurers love” even as he successfully regains the assets he lost to his Uncle and uses his Uncle's empty statements of kinship and affection to rebuild his credit in the city.

Backed by rumors of his rich widow and his Uncle's seeming support, Witt-good navigates the city in safety receiving this “usurers love” from his other creditors as well.



“Creditor 1”, “Creditor 2” and “Cock-pit” quickly turn from seeking their delinquent debtor’s arrest to stepping over one another to help fund his project to marry the rich widow. Like Uncle Lucre, Witt-good’s creditors have their own paydays in mind. Witt-good understands well the nature of his creditors’ love and conveys its underlying violence in his response to one of the creditor’s advances: “You doe so ravish mee with kindnesse, that I’me constrainde, to play the maide and take it” (3.1.39-40). Witt-good’s comparison of his creditors’ extensions of trust to sexual conquest, or perhaps more accurately sexual assault, gets at the perverse conflation of affective domestic relationships with unscrupulous and predatory debt relations in these plays. Time and time again, it is through expressions and gestures of amity or kinship that creditors and usurers destroy their indebted kith and kin. Creditors and usurers kill with kindness; that is, they manipulate their familial, household, and affective ties to seek personal profit at the expense and destruction of their own, inviting unflattering comparisons to the period’s stereotype of the Jew, as we saw above, who at least limits his destructive practices to strangers.

Witt-good’s scheme retaliates by effectively manipulating this “usurers love.” However, the frenzy of courtship around the rich Widdow Medler nearly disrupts his plans. One of Witt-good’s unsuccessful rival suitors for Joyce, Moneylove, quickly transfers his affection to this more lucrative option. This brings the widow to Hoard’s attention, who sees in her an opportunity to enrich himself and get revenge for the “bargaine” Lucre once stole from him. Lucre also courts the widow on his nephew’s behalf in the hopes of getting her lands through mortgage just as he did Witt-good’s. This angers Lucre’s wife Ginnie (once herself a rich widow) who in turn instructs her son, Sam Freeman, to court the widow in the hope of undermining Witt-good, who Lucre is now claiming as his heir in place of his step-son. In this whirlwind of opportunity for Curtizan, Witt-good strays from his original scheme and advises his

cast-off mistress to “do thy selfe a good turne once in thy Dayes” and marry Hoard, for he’s rich and “an old doting foole” (3.1.95-7). While Witt-good does imagine that such a match could benefit him in the long run, he primarily expresses his desire for Curtizan to marry well as a comfort to his “conscience” (3.3.95-100). This moment of “conscience” importantly sets Witt-good apart from the predatory machinations of his creditors. Though he is able to play the game of obscuring economic motivations with pretenses of affection, and though his own ends in the play join love and money in ways that implicate him in the economic ethos of the city, Witt-good’s decision to temporarily place Curtizan’s well-being over his own shows that he recognizes the importance of satisfying his emotive and moral ties to others as an end unto itself, rather than just an efficacious rhetorical stance. Indeed, this move almost undoes Witt-good, since the widow’s sudden marriage to Hoard forecloses the “usurers love” his scheme has relied upon, and sends him straight to debtors’ prison and the Hole, the nadir of city comedy prodigal narratives.

However, Witt-good’s guess that Curtizan’s marriage might benefit him at some point pays off, and the play rewards Witt-good’s choice to temporarily abandon the cleverness of overcoming economic debt for the satisfaction of an emotional one. If killing with kindness is common practice in the world of city comedy where affective ties are replaced by the flow of wealth, then so is being saved by a stranger or an enemy. Just as our sympathetic prodigal faces feeding on the scraps of rotten fish charity provides the inhabitants of the Hole, Curtizan convinces Hoard to pay off all of his debts. Here the reciprocity of affective debt relations prevail over the predatory nature of economic debt relations.<sup>18</sup> Liberated and debt-free, Witt-good marries Joyce and regains his mortgaged lands. That Witt-good should be undone by his

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<sup>18</sup> Leggatt finds “something attractive” in the bond between Witgood, Curtizan, and the Host, particularly their “mutual loyalty and *spirit de corps*” (56). Brissenden also calls attention to the cooperation between Witgood and Curtizan: “They work together as a well-practised team, sharing jokes, pooling ideas, looking after each other” (28).

Uncle, rescued by his Uncle's enemy, and enabled to marry his beloved by the scheming of his former mistress all follow the perverse logic of household and familial relations as rewritten by the economic ethos of city comedy.

This perversity is best seen in the various "unkind" households represented in *A Trick*. Lucre's household exemplifies multiple "unnatural" reorganizations, in which the physical space itself becomes commodified and a site implicated in the vicious relations of brothel and debtors' prison, where bodies are exchanged for money. When Uncle Lucre and Witt-good are first reconciled, Lucre convinces his nephew to bring his rich widow to his house with this assurance: "let Nephewes be ruled as they list, they shall finde their Uncles house, the most natural place when all's done" (2.1.245-47). And yet, houses and households prove anything but again and again. Singing his nephew's praises, Lucre tells the widow that Witt-good is much sought after by the city's widows for being his heir. In imagining what would happen if these "widows" knew he was in town, Lucre actually describes Witt-good's fate as delinquent debtor: "Oh, there would be such running to and fro widdow, hee should not passe the streets for e'm: he'ed bee tooke up in one great house or other presently" (2.1.335-37). This "great house" turns out to be the Counter, a debtors' prison. Immediately following this, Lucre uses his own house to court the widow's affection for his nephew: "you see this house here widdow, this house and all comes to him, goodly Roomes ready furnish, seeld with plaster of paris, and all hung above with cloth of arras" (338-41). This is a common move in city comedies, where houses or well-appointed rooms are used as testaments to a suitor's worth, a materialization and literalization of the credit traditionally derived from association to a particular household and family, particularly in suits of marriage. This commodification of the house gets carried a step further when Lucre instructs Witt-good to try to seal the deal by carrying his rich widow throughout the house's many rooms:

“many a match has beene struck up in my house a this fashion, let e’m try all manner of waies still there’s nothing like an Uncles house to strike the stroake in” (352-54). Lucre’s house here becomes a kind of brothel and Lucre himself a pander.

Adding to this “unnatural” household are Lucre’s second wife, Ginnie, and her son, Sam Freeman. This familial arrangement, though by no means uncommon in the period, is described in a manner that renders these relations strange. Lucre refers to his step-son as his wife’s “tother husbands Sonne” (2.1.292) and disinherits both wife and her son in one fell swoop while wooing the widow for his nephew: “I have no childe of mine owne to care for, shee’s my second wife, old, past bearing, clap sure to him widdow, [Witt-good’s] like to be my heire I can tell you” (2.1.322-24). Lucre’s household is soon divided against itself when his wife Ginnee retaliates by sending Sam after the rich widow for himself: “so certifie her, thou hast two hundred a yeare of thy selfe, beside thy good parts – a proper person and a lovely, if I were a widdow I could find in my heart to have thee for my selfe, sonne, I, from em all” (2.1.380-83). Ginnee’s preference for her son, natural enough in itself, takes on an incestuous quality with these lines which Sam corrects by redirecting his imagined courtship in the proper direction: “Thanke you for your good will mother, but in deed I had rather have a Stranger” (2.1.384-85). This “unnatural” motherly affection mirrors Lucre’s own predatory treatment of his nephew in that both relations are examples of how the kinfolk of city comedies treat one another as strangers, whether to undo them, or in this case, to woo them. When Hoard successfully steals the Widdow Medler from Witt-good, he warns her that in marrying into the Lucre family she would have “not onely matcht your self to wants, but in an evill and unnatural stocke” (3.1.176).

Another way kin and members of the same household often prove “strange” is through a blindness to one another’s true natures or affections. A good example of this occurs when Hoard

visits Dampit, the play's more typical misanthropic and miserly usurer. Hoard has come to invite Dampit to his wedding dinner. Sick with excessive drink, Dampit responds that Hoard has married not a "rich widdow" but a "Duch widdow," a euphemism for "whore" laced throughout the play. Dampit's suggestion comes as no surprise since he casts similar aspersions on his dutiful servant, Audry, even as she patiently attends his sick bed. And yet Dampit's preoccupation with errant female sexuality, linked to his own guilty conscience as a dying usurer, serves to highlight the contrast between the rich country widow Hoard thinks he has married, based solely on rumor, and the poor cast-off country mistress he has actually married:

*Dampit.* Whose this? maister *Hoard!* who hast thou married in the name of foolery.

*Hoard.* A rich widdow.

*Dampit.* A Duch widdow.

*Hoard.* A ritch widdow, --- one widdow Medler.

*Dampit.* *Medler* she keeps open house.

*Hoard.* She did I can tell you in her tother husbands days, open house for all comers, horse and man was welcome, and Roome inough for em all.

*Dampit.* Theres to much for thee then, thou mayst let out some to thy Neighbours.  
(4.5.148-58).

The country house hospitality Hoard imagines his new wife once kept, and which he now imagines himself master of, is not only resonant here with prostitution but with bestiality as well. Rather than a husband, Dampit depicts Hoard as Curtizan's new pander. This wife's profit potential, the exchange suggests, lies not in her country estate and bountiful hospitality, but in Hoard's ability to lend her out to the neighbors, just as he does his money.

Dampit's own household scenes suggest the final stage of the usurer's perverse domestic relations. He has no family around, only parasites and servants. He drinks himself to death and hates and suspects all who attend him. For all his accumulated wealth, he frets about his supply. When one "Lamprey" solicits him for the loan of 100 pounds, Dampit insists he cannot spare it since he only has two thousand pounds in the house (4.5.23-26). A "friend" Sir Lancelot comes

to Dampit's home with another gentleman simply to mock the usurer in his drunkenness.

Dampit's oldest associate and fellow usurer, Gulfe, enters, similarly mad with guilt, and attempts to kill him, proclaiming that now we may see "what Race a Usurer runnes" (4.5.165). As the scene closes, it is unclear, perhaps intentionally so, whether Dampit has fallen into sleep or death. Either way, this depiction of his end days looms as the play's judgment against the predatory avarice threatening the household and familial relations throughout the play.<sup>19</sup>

Following a highly persuasive argument for why a former whore makes the best wife for an older man, Curtizan and Witt-good return us to a redemptive comedic conclusion by reconciling Lucre and Hoard, to each other and their respective cozenages, and by repenting and foreswearing all their former vices. Through Witt-good's keen discernment of the relationship between economic and affective obligations in the city, his own choice to prioritize an affective obligation to Curtizan, and the resulting affective cooperation of Witt-good and Curtizan, a friendship has been restored and two new households have been formed and allied through marriage.<sup>20</sup> For the time being, the predatory appetites of the city have been contained by a restored balance between economic motivation and affective obligation. However, one suspects it is only a matter of time before the next cozenage across these affective ties is under way.

### ***A Chaste Maid in Cheapside***

Middleton again uses "unkind" and "unnatural" households to illustrate the effects of predatory appetites on affection in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613). This somewhat later city

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<sup>19</sup> Leggatt understands Middleton's representation of Dampit as "a safety-valve for disgust" (58). He writes, "Whatever moral outrage Middleton may have felt at the world he depicts is here drained off into a subplot which is never properly integrated with the rest of the play" (58). Brissenden too finds Dampit's connection to the rest of the play "tenuous" and reads him as a "moral *exemplum*" (29).

<sup>20</sup> Brissenden notes that "[i]nstead of destroying families, as prostitutes were commonly held to do (particularly by Puritans), through marriage and repentance Middleton's fallen women redeem themselves, even if the marriage comes about through deception. By marrying they form other family units" (33).

comedy focuses more explicitly on household, marriage, and reproduction in particular.<sup>21</sup> Here the theme of appetite vs. impotence is grafted onto the standard prodigal vs. usurer plot, and households are at least as concerned with fertility as with funding, playing out the age-old association between sexual generation and usury.<sup>22</sup> The play's usurers are implied or metaphorical. Yellowhammer, a goldsmith, figures most explicitly as a social climbing head of household trying to marry his daughter Moll and son Tim up the social ladder. His profession, attempt at overreaching, and position as blocking figure for the quasi-prodigal Touchwood Jr's beloved, Moll, all position him as an implied usurer in the play. Allwit, the play's wittol, or willing cuckold, is explicitly compared to a usurer in his unusual domestic arrangement with the prodigal Sir Walter Whorehound. Sir Oliver Kix and the prodigal Touchwood Sr. similarly arrive at a domestic arrangement reminiscent of usury's connotations with unnatural generation.

The Yellowhammer family offers a good example of the typical unkind city comedy household. Master Yellowhammer is a rising citizen of the city. He and his wife Maudlin express their aspirations of upward social mobility through their children. They contrive to marry their

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<sup>21</sup> Leinwand describes *A Chaste Maid* as the most conventional of city comedies. He too notes the play's proliferation of unkind familial relations but insists that rather than suggesting the moral bankruptcy of the community depicted, it points to the problem with a society "that can envision itself only in roles which derive their substance from hatred and self-interest" (76-77). Leggatt's reading is more interested in the perversity of the familial relationships depicted. He finds in the play "a widespread sickness, in which family values are made to serve financial interests" (139). Howard observes "the astonishing degree to which the commercial values of this center of commerce have percolated through the domestic realm. . . . [The play] pushes the amoral logic of the market deep into the households of London's famous commercial district, making Cheapside households the site where a wife's 'hole' is the chief commodity her husband sells and where children are simply bargaining chips on the way to greater wealth or new forms of cultural capital" (*Theater of a City*, 138, 140). Brissenden notes that these themes span Middleton's plays – "destruction of families by greed, both for money and for sex, is a constant theme in Middleton" (29) – but finds them at their most complex and subversive in *A Chaste Maid* (35, 37).

<sup>22</sup> Stock and Zwierlein discuss the association between sex and usury and how it plays out in city comedy: "Inevitably in a world that still made sense of itself by thinking in micro- and macrocosmic correspondences, early modern capitalism was described, and exposed, by contrasting it with the natural workings and proper management of the body. Usury meant taking 'a breed for barren metal,' that is, reaping the unnatural offspring of that which was naturally unable to multiply. Illicit sexual activity, usually the adulterous liaison between a citizen's wife and a gentle or noble gallant, was employed as an ever titillating dramatic metaphor for urban conflicts over status and possession" (14).

daughter Moll, against her wishes, to Sir Walter Whorehound, an overextended profligate with a title, and while they are at it, to match their effeminate and foolish Cambridge educated son, Tim, to Whorehound's presumably landed "niece" who is actually a cast off mistress with no means. The Yellowhammer household, like that of many London citizens, is both shop and home, so that the affective and familial relationships there take on the quality of commercial transactions with ease.<sup>23</sup> Here familial and affective relationships are marked by "unkindness" both in the parents' inability to know their children, and in the cruelty that the parents show in exerting their socio-economic motivations over the children's own inclinations and affections.

As we saw in *A Trick*, one form of familial "unkindness" occurs when kin or members of the same household are blind to the true nature and affections of one another, rewriting others with their own desires and aspirations. The Yellowhammers are guilty of this blindness, both towards their children's inclinations and affections, and towards the characters of those to whom they would tie their children against their wills. The play opens with a rift between mother and daughter, Maudlin and Moll, in which Maudlin berates her daughter for being "a dull maid" and generally unfit "for a knight's bed" (1.1.4-11). The Yellowhammers' hope to thrust their daughter, "this baggage" (44), onto Whorehound and to match their son Tim to his niece, "to bind us to him, and our heirs, forever" (43), ignoring their children's inclinations in the hopes of grafting themselves into the nobility. Moll's dullness in the pursuit of Sir Whorehound stems from her affection for Touchwood Jr., a prodigal-lite character who is a diminished gentleman and a younger brother. The blindness of the Yellowhammers to Moll's affection is contrasted by Touchwood Jr.'s sympathetic understanding of her plight: "Poor soul, kept in too hard! Her mother's eye/ Is cruel toward her, being kind to him [Whorehound]" (1.1.174-75). Touchwood

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<sup>23</sup> Michelle O'Callaghan too observes how the Yellowsmith household and shop "exploits this social fact of everyday mercantile life, relying heavily on the continuity between domestic and commercial worlds for its drama and symbolism" (Cambridge Companion, 168).



Jr.'s courtship of Moll mocks the blindness he perceives in the Yellowhammer household and manages to turn even his plans for clandestine elopement into a commercial transaction. He boldly commissions Yellowhammer to make and inscribe the wedding ring he will ultimately use to clandestinely attach himself to Moll. Touchwood Jr. has Yellowhammer fit the ring to Moll's finger, describing his beloved as "just such another gentlewoman that's your daughter, sir" (1.1.199-200). The inscription he requests reads, "Love that's wise/ Blinds parents' eyes" (214-15). Though Yellowhammer understands that Touchwood Jr. is a gentleman with the intention to "steal away some man's daughter" (223), it never occurs to him that Moll might be his target. Neither does his sense that "you gentlemen are mad wags" (224) help him in assessing Sir Walter Whorehound's character, the profligate he has chosen to court for a son-in-law instead.

Both Whorehound and Touchwood Jr. are gentlemen interested in refurbishing their nobility with citizen gold by way of Moll, but Touchwood Jr.'s is the more sympathetic claim because it carries the weight of affection. Moll is full of sighs and longing for Touchwood Jr., while she flees whenever Whorehound comes calling (1.1), indicators of Moll's affections to which her parents are blind. Both gentlemen suitors are prodigals of a sort in the play: Whorehound, a pre-fall profligate; Touchstone, clever and impoverished. There is no indication that Touchwood Jr. has squandered a fortune or gotten himself into debt through profligate living; he is simply lacking funds and must rely on his wiles to win this goldsmith's daughter. Because Touchwood Jr. has these sympathetic aspects of the city comedy prodigal and few if any of the vice associations, we root for him and Moll and their clandestine marriage plot, which Master and Maudlin Yellowhammer block time and time again. Touchwood Jr.'s own motivations for marrying Moll are more practical than romantic, but they are expressed in affective terms: "Rather than the gain should fall to a stranger,/ 'Twas honest in me to enrich my

father” (1.1.174-75). Even as he expresses his interest in “the gain” that comes with marrying Moll, he frames it as a means “to enrich my father” rather than himself (179). Indeed, the familial ties of the impoverished Touchwoods often serve as a contrast to the play’s other “unkind” and “unnatural” families and households. In particular, the affectionate cooperation between the brothers Touchwood Jr. and Touchwood Sr. serves as the play’s example of how satisfying the obligations of affective ties can resolve economic difficulties. Furthermore, Touchwood Jr.’s plot, like that of other redeemed prodigals, serves to dole out justice to the cruel “usurers” of the play. By Yellowhammer’s own assertion, “they’re served right/ That have two eyes and wear so dull asight” (1.1.224).

The lack of understanding amongst the members of the Yellowhammer household plays out quite literally with their son Tim. He returns from university full of bad Latin and frivolous logical arguments good for proving a fool a fool and a whore an honest woman. As a sign of upward social mobility, Tim’s university education is a source of pride for Maudlin amongst the neighborhood gossips, though she has little patience for the actual effects of the honor, which appear primarily to highlight Tim’s native foolishness as well as his effeminacy. Tim is uncomfortable in the presence of women, both the old gossips and the young Welsh woman (Sir Walter’s “niece”/cast-of mistress) his parents plan for him to marry. When Tim first returns to the city, he finds his mother at Mrs. Allwit’s christening and tries to flee the company of so many women claiming, “’Tis against the laws of the university for any that has answered under bachelor to thrust ‘mongst married wives” (3.2.140-2). Tim will only remain in the women’s presence if his tutor may join him, and then expresses his revulsion for the women’s wet kisses. Tim’s dependence on his tutor and his timidity and lack of interest around women raises a motif that is repeated throughout the play of male impotence vis-à-vis female appetite. We will see the

same pattern in the Allwit household and the Kix household. Thematically this pattern riffs on usury's associations with unnatural generation, imaged in these households through various alternative arrangements. Tim's homosocial attachment to his tutor is one example of an alternative arrangement identified in the play as an effect of the Yellowhammers' push for upward social mobility. Attempting to make him a gentleman through university education leads to his exclusive preference for his tutor's companionship and his fruitless labor with "logic" and "the Dunces" (3.2.165). Attempting to make him a member of the landed gentry by marrying him to a "stranger" leads to an even stranger ménage a trois with both his tutor and a Welsh whore.

Before discovering the Welsh woman's charms by way of her erotic song, Tim temporarily sets aside his foolishness and recognizes the strangeness of his parents' desire to marry him to a complete stranger because of what she may or may not own:

I mar'l what this gentlewoman should be that I should have in marriage. She's a stranger to me. I wonder what my parents mean, i' faith, to match me with a stranger so – a maid that's neither kiff nor kin to me. Life, do they think I have no more care of my body than to lie with one that I ne'er knew, a mere stranger, one that ne'er went to school with me neither, nor ever playfellows together? They're mightily o'erseen in't, methinks. They say she has mountains to her marriage; she's full of cattle, some two thousand runts. (83-92)

Tim's concern about the Welsh woman's strangeness has as much to do with her foreignness and provincialism as that which they do not know about her personal character and history, lacing his momentary lapse into practical sense with a dose of English-centric and city-centric prejudice that would have sat comfortably with much of the audience. It turns out Tim is right that his parents are "o'erseen in't" but it also turns out that the Welsh whore proves the best match for this squeamish scholar. Tim's association with his tutor continues even as he overcomes his fear of women and their appetites by marrying a whore, creating a new "unnatural" household

somewhat removed from the country estate and mountains of which his parents imagined him lord.

Ironically, The Yellowhammers' unkindness towards their children, motivated by their desire to raise their social status, ends up diminishing the credit of their household. Not only do they push their son into what Yellowhammer describes as "the picture of the unfortunate marriage" (5.4.93), but they are judged cruel by their neighbors and community for their treatment of Moll. When she tries to elope with Touchwood Jr., Maudlin intercepts her in a boat on the Thames and drags her home by the hair. A waterman entreats Maudlin to "spare her!" and calls her "a cruel mother" (4.4.26-8). Even Sir Walter Whorehound, from whose marriage suit Moll was running, is angered by the Yellowhammers' cruel treatment of Moll, threatening the parents to "give over" their harsh treatment, "or I'll give over" (38-44). When the waterman tells Touchwood Jr. what happened to his bride-to-be, we hear what we might take to be the common report that later contributes to the city's judgment of the Yellowhammers as cruel parents: "Half drowned. She cruelly tugged her by the hair, forced her disgracefully, not like a mother" (68-9). Moll feigns her own death as a last attempt to be united with Touchwood Jr., who also pretends to have died as a result of wounds sustained in a duel with his rival, Sir Walter. The Yellowhammers express some measure of sorrow for what they think is their daughter's sudden death brought on by her recent half-drowning in the Thames and grief over news of her beloved's end, but their main concern is how this event will impact their reputation. Yellowhammer quickly formulates a plan for saving face and not losing all the profit they had hoped for in allying with Sir Walter:

|                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Yellowhammer</i> | All the whole street will hate us, and the world/ Point me out cruel.<br>It is our best course, wife,/ After we have given order for the<br>funeral,/ To absent ourselves till she be laid in ground. |
| <i>Maudlin</i>      | Where shall we spend that time?                                                                                                                                                                       |

|                     |                                                                                                               |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Yellowhammer</i> | I'll tell thee where, wench:/ Go to some private church, and marry<br>Tim/ To the rich Brecknock gentlewoman. |
| <i>Maudlin</i>      | Mass, a match!/<br>(5.2.108-17)                                                                               |

In the Yellowhammer household, then, the natural affections and kindness between parents and children is replaced by a profit motive, in this case, the citizen's desire to enter the landed gentry.

The Allwit household is the play's most perverse reorganization of the traditional model. We are introduced to the arrangement by Master Allwit, a willing cuckold whose wife, Mrs. Allwit has been Sir Walter Whorehound's kept mistress for ten years. Sir Walter does not only keep Mrs. Allwit, but the entire household. When Allwit sees that Sir Walter has returned to the city from the country, he praises the return of the "the Founder:"

"Bless the Right Worshipful the good Founder's life!"  
 I thank him, he's maintained my house this ten years;  
 Not only keeps my wife, but 'a keeps me  
 And all my family. I am at his table;  
 He gets me all my children, and pays the nurse  
 Monthly or weekly; puts me to nothing,  
 Rent, nor church duties, not so much as the scavenger.  
 The happiest state that ever man was born to! (1.2.15-22)

Allwit's praise turns quickly from "the Founder" to the wittol's life, as the arrangement he describes seems to profit him most. Allwit describes perpetually full stocks of all the comforts that make a merry household: food on the table, a warm fire, plenty of coal and firewood, and all the luxuries Mrs. Allwit could wish for as she lies in to deliver yet another child, also provided by Sir Walter. Allwit views all "like a happy man" because "I pay for none at all, yet fools think's mine;/ I have the name, and in his gold I shine" (1.2.39-41). Allwit seems at first a debtor figure to Sir Walter, "the Founder" who pays for his household and in whose gold his name shines. And yet the unusual dynamic between "the Founder" and his wittol proves to be quite the

reverse. Allwit is one of the play's metaphorical usurers, and Sir Walter, his prodigal on the verge of a fall.

The confusing nature of their relation is signaled early on by the servants and the children of the Allwit household. When Allwit learns of Sir Walter's return to the city, he makes his house ready to receive him like a hospitable host preparing for an honored guest.

*Allwit*            Now sirs, Sir Walter's come.  
*First Servant*   Is our master come?  
*Allwit*            Your master? What am I?  
*First Servant*   Do not you know, sir?  
*Allwit*            Pray, am not I your master?  
*First Servant*   Oh, you are but our mistress's husband.  
*Allwit*            Ergo, knave, your master. (1.2.62-8).

Allwit's "happy" arrangement is not without its indignities, then. Throughout the plays examined in this chapter, the loyalty and obedience, or lack thereof, of household servants is an important indication of how effectively the balance between affective obligations and economic concerns is being managed. Sir Walter's own servant, Davy – also his kin and potential heir – conspires with Master Allwit in the hopes of preventing his marriage to Moll Yellowhammer which would potentially produce a legitimate heir (though neither conspirator counts on Yellowhammer being so unkind a father as to proceed with the union despite his full knowledge of Sir Walter's kept mistress and household). The confusion over who presides as the head of the Allwit household reflects the separation of these roles divided between Sir Walter and Master Allwit. Sir Walter is largely an absent figure who funds all expenses, including servants' wages, and jealously protects his right to Mrs. Allwit's bedchamber. And yet, Master Allwit dotes on Sir Walter's newborn daughter, and his older bastard sons affectionately recognize Allwit, the nominal head of household and constant presence in the home, as "Father," a fact Allwit seeks to hide from Sir Walter (1.2.122-24), despite Sir Walter's evident lack of feeling for the boys. When they address

Sir Walter with enforced bows, his response is to wonder to himself how he might dispose of them as apprentices to keep them from mingling with his legitimate heirs once he has married Moll Yellowhammer (130-39).

Though Allwit's own servants might think he's "but one pip above a servingman, and so much his horns make him" (71-2), Sir Walter describes his relation to Allwit differently. As Sir Walter jealously questions the servants about who Mrs. Allwit has received in his absence, the servant turns to Master Allwit to confirm his report. Sir Walter's response is telling: "Do you think I'll trust him? As a usurer/ With forfeited lordships. Him? Oh, monstrous injury!/ Believe him? Can the devil speak ill of darkness?" (1.2.104-6). Despite Allwit's seemingly deferential position to Sir Walter, the profligate gentleman's description of his wittol as his usurer is a more fitting description of their relationship. Mrs. Allwit is the gold that Master Allwit willingly lends to Sir Walter; the expense of the ever growing household is the interest Sir Walter has to pay, and Allwit often emphasizes his own lack of labor, one of the "unnatural" aspects of the usurer's profit in anti-usury discourse. And yet, just who has the power in this usurious relationship shifts from moment to moment. Allwit removes his hat in deference to Sir Walter's presence, and Sir Walter entreats him to put it back on. Allwit keeps it off, however, until Sir Walter's second entreaty to do so, explaining "Now I must do it, or he'll be as angry now as if I had put it on at first bidding" (86-7). Sir Walter's authority as "the Founder" requires a careful performance of subjugation from Allwit, then. Yet Allwit lets us in on what he refers to as "the game" between them, the precarious management of shifting authority and deference, motivated by jealousy and fear of losing what each needs from the other. Sir Walter has heard from a servant in the household that Master Allwit once tried to "go to bed to" his wife and threatens that if he does, "you shall take all" – that is, the expenses of the household, along with the rites of the

bedchamber. Sir Walter observes that this threat “wakes the slave and keeps his flesh in awe” (1.2.115-16), and yet Allwit has his own means for keeping Sir Walter enthralled to his household. In an aside he determines to “stop that gap,” or silence Sir Walter’s source of information, just as he has previously worked behind the scenes to manage Sir Walter: “I have poisoned/ His hopes in marriage already/ Some old rich widows and some landed virgins” (117-19), just as we see Master Allwit attempt to block the marriage between Sir Walter and Moll by revealing the seedy details of the gentleman’s kept mistress and household to Yellowhammer. Allwit may wear the horns in the situation, but he depicts Sir Walter as a steer being led by himself: “’tis but observing a man’s humor once, and he may ha’ him by the nose all his life” (1.2.88-9).

Though the head of this household may be uncertain, its center is undoubtedly in Mrs. Allwit’s bedchamber. There Mrs. Allwit lies in the fullness of imminent childbirth and, afterwards, as the center of domestic prosperity. She is described in terms that tie her both to excessive feminine appetite and to the city’s commodities.<sup>24</sup> We hear often of Mrs. Allwit’s longings – for “pickled cucumbers” and Sir Walter’s “coming” (1.2.7-8), for the meats forbidden during this time of Lent to all but pregnant women (2.2). Master Allwit describes his wife’s bedchamber in language that both surrounds her with commodities and couples her with them: “A lady lies not in like her: there’s her embossing,/ Embroid’rings, spangling, and I know not what,/ As if she lay with all the gaudy shops/ In Gresham’s Burse about her; then her restoratives,/ Able to set up a young pothecary/ And richly stock the foreman of a drug shop;/ Her sugar by whole loaves, her wines by runlets” (1.2.32-38). Master Allwit is relieved to shift

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<sup>24</sup> O’Callaghan observes, “Her swelling maternal body is satirically mirrored in the copious variety of luxuries she possesses and consumes . . . The depiction of Mistress Allwit’s coalescing maternal and material appetites arises out of the ubiquitous cultural equation of women’s bodies with household goods, and provides a clear illustrating of how consumption is frequently feminized within satiric accounts of the city” (Cambridge Companion, 168).



the burden of his wife's various appetites to Sir Walter. Disdainfully observing the gossips' appetites for sweetmeats and comfits at his wife's christening, Allwit remarks, "No mar'l I heard a citizen complain once that his wife's belly only broke his back. Mine had been all in fitters seven years since but for this worthy knight, that with a prop upholds my wife and me and all my estate buried in Bucklersbury" (3.2.74-8). Mrs. Allwit's appetites, like those of the gossips', are represented then as the driving force behind the unnatural arrangement of the Allwit household.

In this city comedy, women are hungry and their appetites must be funded one way or another. The play's inclusion of two promoters who police the consumption of meat during Lent, only so that they might give their confiscated goods "to their Molls and Dolls" (2.2.70-3), highlights this theme. Just as these promoters seek to satisfy their whores' appetites with "poor calves and sheep" (66), those men they spy hurrying home with forbidden "veal" and "mutton" do so invariably to satisfy "my wife's kindred" (124) and "my mistress's diet" (139-40). Where avarice among male usurers and creditors and profligate living among young gentlemen prodigals generally fuel the confusion of economic and affective relations in city comedies, here it is the dictate of women's appetites expressed both as the excessive consumption of commodities and foodstuffs, and as sexual reproduction. The two symptoms of female appetite are conflated to humorous effect when the promoters discover that the illegal meat they have confiscated from a strangely cooperative young woman turns out to be an illegitimate baby – one of Touchwood Sr.'s bastards – intentionally abandoned. In these promoters, as in Master Allwit, consumption and reproduction are linked to the unnatural cruelty of the usurer and hard-hearted creditor.<sup>25</sup> Allwit himself describes them as "ravenous creditors that will not suffer/ The bodies

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<sup>25</sup> O'Callaghan notes, "The play imagines a city driven by carnal appetite, in which the sacred has been profaned and Lent reduced to a commercial opportunity for exploiting restrictions against eating meat. The promoters. . . are instead confiscating meat from their fellow citizens for their own profit. Like the creditors in Middleton's earlier city

of their poor departed debtors/ To go to th'grave, but e'en in death to vex/ And stay the corpse with bills of Middlesex" (2.2.67-70). Master Allwit plays his own part as the cruel usurer when Sir Walter Whorehound's inevitable fall finally comes.

As we saw in *A Trick*, in Sir Walter's downfall, strangers prove kind and kindred unkind. Sir Walter's profligate ways do not prepare us to sympathize with him, but his downfall does come primarily as the result of plots beyond his own, and immediately after he expresses a desire to reform his ways. Touchwood Jr. challenges him to a duel in which both are wounded, and with this act, awakens him to his sin and this belated desire for reform. After receiving his injury, Sir Walter refuses to finish the duel, insisting "I have certain things to think on/Before I dare go further" (4.4.82-3). When a wounded Sir Walter is brought 'home' to the Allwits, he sees his unnatural family for what it is, and Master Allwit above all as the devil who has kept him enthralled to sin: "None knew the dear account my soul stood charged with/ So well as thou, yet, like hell's flattering angel,/ Wouldst never tell me on't, let'st me go on/ And join with death in sleep, that if I had not/ Waked now by chance, even by a stranger's pity,/ I had everlastingly slept out all hope/ Of grace and mercy" (5.1.28-33). Sir Walter cites "a stranger's pity" as the basis for his reformation, presumably Touchwood Jr.'s unfinished attempt on his life which motivated him, and spared him, to consider his life. This "stranger's pity" is far more than he receives from the Allwits once they realize that Sir Walter plans to leave them nothing in his will, and that he is wanted for the feigned death of Touchwood Jr. and for his many debts that crowd in on him now that his cousins have produced an heir. In his moment of need, wounded and seeking asylum from arrest, the Allwits deny the strange kinship that joins them to Sir Walter, and play the part of husband and obedient wife whose hospitality has been grossly

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comedy, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, who demand either 'money or carcass', the promoters embody the city's predatory energies" (169).

abused: “I must tell you, sir,/ You have been somewhat bolder in my house/ Than I could well like of. I suffered you/ Till it stuck here at my heart. I tell you truly/ I thought you had been familiar with my wife once” (5.1.156-59).

Like many of his fellow city comedy prodigals, Sir Walter ends the play in debtors’ prison, but his usurer and mistress are relatively unharmed by the turn of events, realizing that the home stocked by Sir Walter could itself prove a profitable commodity:

*Allwit*                We are richly furnished, wife, with household-stuff.  
*Mrs. Allwit*        Let’s let out lodgings, then, and take a house in the Strand. (5.1.173-75).

The Allwits can simply cash in their unnatural household and set up shop elsewhere.

The unkind and unnatural households of *A Chaste Maid* prove so because of an imbalance between their affective productivity and their economic productivity. In the Yellowhammer household, natural affection and kindness towards the children is replaced by a desire for upward social mobility that renders these children commodities in the marriage market. The Allwit household, and all the domestic relationships and pleasures within it, are commodified and lent out to an outsider in exchange for a fully funded lifestyle. The relationship between affective productivity – particularly reproduction – and economic household management is most explicit in the play’s juxtaposition of the Touchwoods’ and the Kixs’ households. Touchwood Jr.’s elder brother, Touchwood Sr., is described as “a fine gentleman,/ But run behindhand much with getting children” (2.1.188-89). We meet him and his wife at the scene of their reluctant separation, an effort to deter the prolific fertility that has impoverished them. Here Touchwood Sr. sets up the dichotomy between fertility and riches quite clearly: “Some only can get riches and no children;/ We only can get children and no riches” (2.1.11-12). The Touchwoods are perhaps the play’s least deficient couple in the realm of affection. They dote on one another at their parting, and Touchwood Sr. describes their connection as spiritual as

well as physical: “A man’s happy/ When he’s at poorest that has matched his soul/ As rightly as his body” (23-4). And yet, the profits of this affection, “every year a child, and some years two” (15), have created an economic deficit for their household. The Touchwoods’ household is an example of a household broken by an excess of affection, or more accurately, by an excess of reproduction driven by Touchwood Sr.’s robust virility. Touchwood Sr.’s libido and virility become the clear culprit when, upon his wife’s departure, a “[country] wench” confronts him with her illegitimate child (the same later abandoned with the promoters) and warns that her cousin plans to sue him for yet another. Touchwood Sr. escapes responsibility by giving her money, chasing the excessive spending of his own fertility with what little means he possesses, creating an unusual one-way economy in which productivity leads to cost rather than profit. Touchwood Sr., a sympathetic prodigal like his brother due to his participation in an authentic affectionate relationship, finds a way to turn this model around, however, when he meets the Kixs, the play’s contrasting example of how “Some only can get riches and no children.”

Where the Touchwoods’ dote, the Kixes are perpetually at odds with one another. Lady Kix weeps and rails that she is seven years a wife with no child (135-37). The fault appears to lie with Sir Oliver Kix, one of the play’s impotent males (like Tim and Allwit). Lady Kix proclaims herself to be fully operational – “Can any woman have a greater cut?” (2.1.138) – and Sir Oliver confesses his inabilities – “I know ‘tis great, but what of that, wife?/ I cannot do withal” (2.1.139-40), and “I’m not given to standing” (3.3.134). Sir Oliver has used his substantial means to try what remedies the apothecary has to offer but to no avail. The problem creates discord in the marriage and threatens the break-up the household. Lady Kix mocks Sir Oliver’s impotence and “brevity” while he, in turn, disapproves of his wife’s sexual appetite. Sir Oliver threatens divorce, to sell their house and leave his wealth to “some fruitful whore” and her children

(3.3.61-3, 88-9). The sterility of the Kixes' marriage bears a clear relation to their economic motivations. Not only are the Kixes wealthy, but their reproductive efforts are underwritten by the desire to produce an heir and gain a fortune rather than by passion or affection. Just as the two begin to show their disdain for one another as sexual partners, Lady Kix motivates Sir Oliver with the specter of inheritance: "Think but upon the goodly lands and livings/ That's kept back through want on't. [. . .] 'Tis our dry barrenness puffs up Sir Walter./ None gets by your not getting but that knight" (2.1.155-56, 159-60). For the Kixes, then, their deficit of productivity, which is paired significantly with their deficit of affection, also proves costly.

Overhearing the plight of this couple, Touchwood Sr. sees an opportunity to adopt the city comedy ethos and commodify his assets, presenting himself, through the Kixes' maid, as a bonafide, and costly, fertility expert. Touchwood Sr.'s course of treatment consists of getting Sir Oliver out of the house for several hours while he takes care of Lady Kix "abed" (3.3.170). Lady Kix's pregnant belly becomes both the making of the Touchwoods and the downfall of Sir Walter Whorehound, whose expected fortune falls now to the child. In an inversion of the Allwit household, Sir Oliver entreats Touchwood Sr. to allow him to fund his productive household: "I am so endeared to thee for my wife's fruitfulness that I charge you both, your wife and thee, to live no more asunder for the world's frowns. I have purse and bed and board for you. [...] Get children, and I'll keep them" (5.4.81-5). The strangely intertwined households achieve a balance between reproduction and the striving for economic resources through the exchange of their own surplus commodities. The arrangement prevents two households from breaking up in the way the other unnatural households do, and it redistributes the play's wealth among those who have more affective savvy than economic. Perhaps then in the world of city comedy where characters typify single humors in the extremes of excess and deficiency, this sort of market-based cooperation is

the most effective means of achieving the balance that keeps households afloat and “natural” in their management of affective and economic obligations. And yet, its similarity to the Allwit arrangement, the Touchwood and Kix cooperative is suggestive of future disruption at best.

The play’s answer to its many unnatural and unkind households lies instead in the cooperation between Touchwood Sr. and Touchwood Jr., the two characters with the least money and thus the least to gain from one another economically.<sup>26</sup> The interactions of these brothers are mutually supportive throughout the play. Each pursues his own way in the city using his individual gift – Jr. his cleverness, Sr. his virility – turning to the other for help in their schemes and for emotional support and goodwill. The affection between the brothers is evident, as each expresses the desire that his brother will achieve his desired end. Touchwood Jr. advises his brother on the best way to proceed with the Kixes (3.3.1-14), and Touchwood Sr. plays a large role in his younger brother’s plot to marry Moll, helping to convey her along the Thames, delivering the news of Jr.’s feigned death, and giving the eulogy that prepares everyone to consent to the young lovers’ clandestine marriage. The sympathetic prodigal brothers end with their fortunes considerably better off than they began at least in part due to their affective cooperation.

In *A Chaste Maid*, unnatural households are shown to result from an imbalance between a household’s affective and economic functions. Indeed, even an excess of affection feeds into the

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<sup>26</sup> Leinwand would disagree. His reading suggests that the play offers no triumphant protagonist in the city game: “By qualifying his approval of every figure in the play, Middleton is able to suggest the uniform inadequacy of the roles assumed by his gentry and citizens alike” (134). He finds Touchwood Jr. inept at securing his bride without the help of his brother. For my reading, this cooperation is the point. Leggatt’s reading is closer to my own on this count. He writes, “The most successful players are the Touchwood brothers, who are acting out of motives with which the audience would normally sympathize in any case. Touchwood junior and Moll Yellowhammer are in love, and want to frustrate the mercenary match her parents have arranged. Touchwood senior, though he sells himself to the Kixs, does so to support his wife and family, to whom he is genuinely devoted” (140). Howard’s brief reading does not assign special significance to the Touchwoods’ ends. Rather she finds that the play avoids any “obvious moralizing,” noting that the only character who expresses repentance, Whorehound, is also the only character explicitly punished. Howard is more interested in how “the unrepentant characters fluidly refashion themselves and escape punishment” (*Theater of a City*, 139).

market's infiltration into the household since appetites and reproduction fuel market consumption and other transferrals of money, such as inheritance. While all of the characters participate in or take advantage of the unkind and unnatural household relations created by the city's predatory appetites, those characters who manage to transcend economic motivation through authentic affectionate cooperation prove the most successful on both fronts. However, the Allwits' clean escape from their Founder's fall stands as a reminder that the "predatory cycle" (Paster 152) of city comedy will continue.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Greene's Tu Quoque***

The trope of the unkind household is not confined to the city comedy of Middleton. J. Cooke's *Greene's Tu Quoque* (1611) is worth a look here in particular because, like *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, it counters its unkind household and familial relations with strong affective sibling relationships that are ultimately more effective in creating new, economically sound households than those the play's more socio-economically driven characters posit or temporarily create.

Much of the play's action occurs in the wake of the newly minted Sir Lyonell Rash's *rash* decision to abandon his shop and household. Previously a mercer and head of household

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<sup>27</sup> Gibbons reads this conclusion as a mark of appreciation for Allwit's wit. He writes, "Middleton's treatment of Allwit is powerfully ironic, the conclusion of the play manifestly condemns Allwit, and yet for Allwit financial and material success and enjoyment continue. He is not punished . . . Allwit, like Jonson's Lovewit in *The Alchemist*, is perfectly adapted to his environment; he wins what he has and can keep it, as long as his wit holds out (to paraphrase Hobbes)" (129-30). My reading, however, finds the Touchwoods to be the clear victors in the game of the play. Allwit's punishment will no doubt be more of the same, to become a wittol in the Strand just as he was in the home furnished by Whorehound. Leinwand offers a similar suggestion: "Middleton explodes the entire convention of merchant-citizen cleverness with Allwit. Unlike Quomodo, or Hoard, he is not first clever and then shown to be a dupe; rather he is always perceived as a fool (in spite of his cleverness)" (79). Leggatt finds Allwit to be "the most enslaved character in the play" (140). Rather, Leggatt finds it problematic that Yellowhammer speaks the play's concluding lines, "a function usually reserved for sympathetic or reformed characters." He concludes, "Money counts, right up the final curtain" (143).

that includes a son, two daughters, and apprentice, Sir Lyonell purchases a knighthood and abandons these responsibilities in order to pursue a life befitting his new exalted station by trading his “Citty coate” for “the Court jacket,” relocating to the Strand, and engaging in full time hospitality with city luminaries (1.1.129-53). Sir Lyonell leaves his shop and house in the hands of his apprentice, a typical unsympathetic prodigal named Spendall, who proceeds to do just that with the Rash estate. Much of Spendall’s spending goes toward the maintenance of a false household consisting of pander, bawd, and prostitute: Pursenet, Sweatman, and Nan Tickleman. Spendall quickly moves from paying for their companionship, to paying their rent and bills, feeding and clothing them, and maintaining them as though they were indeed the family he addresses them as: “Here sister, mother, and master Pursenet; nay, good sir, be not so dejected, for by this wine, to morrow I will send you stuffe for a new suite, and as much as shall line you a cloake cleane through” (1.4.362-65). As we saw with Sir Walter Whorehound and the Allwit household, when Spendall’s prodigal trajectory leads him toward arrest and the Hole, this false family shuts him out of doors, denying any connection to the delinquent debtor, though the forty shillings he just gave them would buy his liberty. Moments previous to Spendall’s arrest, Nan Tickleman professes her affection for him and swears “there’s/ No adversitie in the world shall part us” (1.13.1681-82). Once it is evident the prodigal has turned bankrupt, however, Nan is not content to simply close the doors upon Spendall, but chooses to publicly deny their association as well: “Why you impudent Rogue, do you come to me for Mony?/ Or do I know you? What acquaintance pray,/ Hath ever past betwixt your self and mee?” (XIII.1728-29). Spendall is hauled off to the Hole mid-play, leaving room for us to see what lesson he takes from the effects of his false householding: “That I could write my repentance to the world,/ and force th’ impression of it in the hearts/ Of you, and my acquaintance, I might teach them/ By my



example, to looke home to Thrift,/ And not to range abroad to seeke out Ruine” (IV.2152-56).

Spendall’s lesson might well be directed at his former master, Sir Lyonell Rash, who similarly risks his ruin by ranging abroad rather than attending to his household.

In abandoning his store and home to Spendall to pursue his own socio-economic upward mobility, Sir Lyonell Rash threatens to destroy his household by robbing his son, Will Rash, of his inheritance and his daughters, Gartred and Joyce, of good husbands. Sir Lyonell seeks to create new households based on the promise of more money and social standing. Blind to his daughters’ affections, Sir Lyonell attempts to marry them off to the play’s two fools, Bubble and Scattergood, while he pursues the rich Widow Raysby for himself. In Sir Lyonell’s absence, Will Rash proves the play’s best householder, managing two love-matches for his sisters.

The relationships between the Rash siblings present a sharp contrast to those of Spendall’s false household and those of the similarly false households Sir Lyonell attempts to create. Will knows his sisters well, sees the value in those would-be husbands they choose for themselves, and assists both the coy Gartred and the shrewish Joyce to overcome the obstacles that would stand in their way. Once Will has safely conveyed all the clandestine lovers out of his father’s clutches, including the reformed prodigal Spendall and the rich widow intended for Sir Lyonell, he reflects on the moral tenor of his actions: “if my father should know of my villanie, how should I fare then? But all’s one, I ha done my sisters good, my friends good, and my selfe good, and a general good is always to be respected before a particular” (XIX.2712-16). In keeping with conventional morality, Will’s moral tenet values the common good over self-interest, an expected commentary on the typical avaricious and predatory humors dramatized by city comedy; but significantly, Will Rash does keep an eye on his own economic interest as well as the happiness of his siblings and friends: “ther’s eight score pounds a yeare saved, by the

conveyance of this widdow” (2716-17). The common good achieved by ensuring that the play’s characters are coupled off according to their affections (even in the case of the proverbial prodigal and widow), rather than Sir Lyonell’s socio-economic aspirations, then, includes keeping an eye on the household’s financial well-being. And indeed, once the couples are married and three new households founded on mutual affection are represented on the stage, all of the economic crises that threatened throughout the play are tidily resolved.

Sir Lyonell intended his shrewish daughter Joyce to marry Bubble, a former servant recently enriched by his uncle-usurer’s death. Bubble is a fool, famously played by Robert Greene, easily gulled into wasting his fortune on becoming a gentleman by his master-turned-servant Staines, the chief victim of the usurer-uncle. But the clever Joyce loves Staines instead, despite his seeming position as a prodigal’s servant. After the two are married, Bubble’s debts quickly surface, Staines regains his mortgage and is once again his servant’s master. A household of mutual affection and economic stability is created where a loveless and indebted one might have been. Similarly, Sir Lyonell would have married his daughter Gartred to the fool Scattergood, while Will helps her to Geraldine, not only the man she loves and who loves her, but one who appears economically stable by his absence from all the play’s scenes of prodigality and gambling, and a family friend whose father blesses the union “since they love” (XIX.2875). Sir Lyonell recognizes the good fortune of these matches and quickly makes the best of them, also bestowing his blessing on his daughters’ unions. The Widow Raysby also entreats Sir Lyonell’s blessing, urging love as absolution for her clandestine marriage with his apprentice:

|                |                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Widow</i>   | And upon us that love Sir Lyonell.                                                                                                   |
| <i>Lyonell</i> | By my troth since thou hast tane the yong knave,/ God give thee joy of him, and may he prove/ A wiser man than his Master. (2879-82) |

With his concluding couplet, Spendall promises that “henceforth I’le play the civil Citizen” (2931), and if we can read the claim straight, then the apprentice indeed proves wiser than his Master, the Citizen who played the prodigal knight with his household. With this conclusion, Will Rash proves the play’s hero by being its most conscientious householder, effectively satisfying both the affective and economic needs of his family: “Gentles, I hope, that well my labor ends,/ All that I did was but to please my friends” (2920-21). In pleasing his friends and family, Will saves his father’s (and his own) estate, and creates three new households secure in their balance of mutual affection and economic stability.

*Greene’s Tu Quoque* participates in the city comedy’s representation of unkind and unnatural households organized around economic relations and aspirations. The play’s answer to this problem lies in the sibling relationships of the Rash family, and Will Rash’s careful management of the affections within his household and undergirding potential households. This careful management rests on knowing his sisters and friends, understanding who and how they love, and balancing these matters with a concern for the bottom line.

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In these city comedies, London’s commercial culture intrudes upon the household and family, reorganizing and obscuring “natural” relations between parents and children, uncles and nephews, and masters and servants. Characters driven by aspirations of social and economic mobility prove unkind to their kin by commodifying them or profiting from their ruin. The strangeness of this behavior often stems from a blindness to the true nature of others, treating kith and kin as strangers, or trying to adopt strangers as kith and kin. Most disastrously, many of these characters create false households that imitate familial and domestic relationships but are in truth markets for the exchange of bodies, pleasures, and commodities for money. In keeping with

their comedic emplotments, the blind, broken, and false households created by this genre's commercial ethos give way to the creation of new households, founded on marriage, sometimes under false pretenses, and almost always through clandestine conveyance. Affectionate relationships carry an illicit value in these plays, like ill-gotten goods in a blackmarket, perhaps because lovers are often reformed prodigals or otherwise financially diminished gentlemen. And yet, the triumph of love often comes hand-in-hand with the restoration of credit and economic stability. City comedies do not answer the unnatural relations of a commercial culture with a nostalgic insistence on the Christian debt of love then, so much as with households founded on a balance between affection and economic stability.

Knowing and Owing in Town and Country

In the previous section we have seen how household and familial relations are rendered strange and unkind by the commercial ethos and predatory appetites of the city. In the plays that follow, we will see many of the same tropes and set-pieces: prodigal nephews, usurer-uncles, rich widows, debt plots driven by profligacy, self-interest, and class aspirations. Household and familial relations are similarly prominent in these plays, but they are part of a more pointed focus on civic and neighborly relations up and down the social hierarchy, and between the city and the countryside. Thomas Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part 2* (1605) dramatizes (and resolves) a lost sense of obligation to those lower on the social scale with a Queen who does not know her Citizen creditor, a Citizen creditor who does not know his country debtor, and a rich merchant and city benefactor whose extravagant benefactions and hospitality never seem to include the poor. Here, those at the top or those moving up the social ladder forget what they owe and no longer know those below them, whether it be their subjects, their debtors, or those who rely on charity.

Philip Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (mid-1620s) is similarly concerned with class relations, but here the landed nobility and the countryside are privileged over the citizens implicated in this commercial ethos. Here debt is specifically an aristocratic problem fueled to some degree by the profligate living of young noble heirs, but mostly by the overreaching and villainy of city usurers who prey on such men for their land. The reciprocal and yet rigidly hierarchical relations of the well managed country estate are threatened by the predatory aspirations of city usurers and disloyal servants vying for their own upward social mobility. Here, then, the problem is that those pursuing upward social mobility actively conspire against those social superiors who stand in the way. In both of these plays, the vertical social relations under threat are relationships with affective ties – a monarch and her subject, a creditor and debtor, a benefactor and the poor, an uncle and a nephew, a master and a servant – and yet these relationships turn strange and unkind when they are inscribed by this commercial milieu.

If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody, Part 2

The characters and plots of Heywood's chronicle are similar to those of city comedy, but his tone is closer to Thomas Dekker's praise than the satire of Cooke or Middleton.

Nonetheless, I submit that critics have a tendency to read Heywood as more laudatory in his representations of Citizens in this play than the text supports.²⁸ Heywood's critiques of the city's

²⁸ See, for example, Gibbons who uses Heywood's chronicle as the counter example to the satire of Middleton's city comedies. He writes, "By contrast a non-satiric chronicle play like Heywood's *If You Know Not Me*, (2) may give a laboriously detailed account of the building of the Royal Exchange in London, depicting the historical character Sir Thomas Gresham and taking much trouble to include authentic detail for its own sake, but its attentiveness to authenticity in external details of fact is rendered ineffectual because of the complete failure to grasp social and political principles and implications. The portrait of Gresham is a piece of banal mercantile hagiography. . ." (118). Leggatt too sees Heywood's plays as distinct from other citizen comedies due to their "moral earnestness" (11). However, though he sees this earnestness at work in some of the scenes of *If You Know Not Me*, 2, he finds that "the treatment of the young prodigals in this play . . . is casual and even amoral in a way that is by no means characteristic" (12). Howard observes that Heywood's portrayal of Sir Thomas Gresham in particular points to "contradictions and ambivalences in his representation of this merchant and of the emerging world of international, high-risk commerce that he comes to represent. On the one hand Heywood's Gresham displays breathtaking ambition and capacity for risk. . . And yet he fits strangely into the model of city worthy made popular by John

commercial culture are similar to those found in more typical city comedy, even as he points the way to virtuous management of social and economic relations by way of remembering one's affective obligations. The best of Heywood's characters repeatedly err in their social relations by not recognizing their debt relations with people below them on the social scale. Interestingly, these violations of the reciprocity that is so crucial to making hierarchical social relations work often occur in the name of important household and civic virtues. The play's central characters – Master Hobson, a humble and prosperous Citizen and shopkeeper, and Sir Thomas Gresham, a rich civic benefactor and merchant – struggle to exemplify the virtues of charity, hospitality, and thrift without becoming hardhearted creditors and excessive prodigals. This least cynical of the plays examined in this chapter is rife with anxieties concerning a changing social order and knowing one's place and ties within that changing order, as well as striking the proper balance between liberality and thrift.

Symptoms of unkind and unnatural household and familial relations like those we have seen previously are in evidence in *If You Know Not Me*, 2 as well, but here natural affinities and kindness are restored through forgiveness and reconciliation. As we have seen before, there is an uncle/nephew relationship that centers on the struggle over a patrimony, though here it is the prodigal nephew who appears most at fault. Sir Thomas Gresham, the historically famous merchant and creditor to Queen Elizabeth, holds his prodigal nephew John's patrimony, presumably for safe-keeping. John (Jack) Gresham does everything in his power to cozen his uncle and Master Hobson, the shopkeeper to whom his uncle apprentices him, out of money to

Stow's Survey of London (1598) and evoked in the play by the Dean of St. Paul's Dr. Nowell. . . He is juxtaposed throughout the play to old Hobson, a haberdasher of modest means who nonetheless gives charitable aid to some of the city's most impoverished members. . . From the juxtaposition of these worlds, Heywood creates a play that looks both backward and forward, commemorating what London worthies have created in the past and dramatizing with some ambivalence the new breed of men who promise fair to replace them" ("Thomas Heywood," 126). Elsewhere, she argues that the play's representation of the Royal Exchange suggests "how powerfully the place could channel anxieties . . . about the potential for new commercial practices and values to push out old" (*Theater of a City*, 51).

make up for this. John is a prodigal at the height of his profligacy, deeply unsympathetic, and yet his uncle forgives him repeatedly, seeing in this prodigal's behavior a likeness to his own misspent youth: "When I was yong I doe remember well,/ I was as very a knaue as he is now./ [...] Ha, ha, mad *Jack*, Gramercie for this flight,/ This hundred pounds makes me thy Vncle right" (vi.961-66). Here, rather than justifying the exploitation of kindred, prodigality confirms and even strengthens kinship ties. Furthermore, John's ploy to steal the hundred pounds being transferred from Sir Thomas to Master Hobson, inadvertently reveals the much greater thefts of his uncle's trusted factor, Timothy Thinbeard, who confesses to stealing five hundred pounds from his master when John has him arrested in order to escape with his own stolen pounds. John's disobedience and profligacy, then, have the unexpected effect of revealing the betrayals of a trusted servant and recovering five hundred pounds, even as he takes one hundred based on this sound reasoning: "My father gave me a portion,/ You keepe away my due:/ I have payd my self a part to spend" (vi.922-24). In Heywood's optimistic spin on the uncle-nephew trope, prodigality is a foible of youth that endears the nephew to the uncle,²⁹ and the uncle's possession of the nephew's patrimony is a matter of well-intentioned oversight rather than theft. And yet, as we will see, Sir Thomas Gresham's recognition of himself in mad Jack's prodigality may say more about the merchant-citizen's own misguided expenditures and the way London's prosperous citizens spend their money in pursuit of nobility than about a well-managed affectionate relationship between kin.

Another familiar symptom of unkind social relations can be found in the dispute between Sir Thomas Gresham and Sir Thomas Ramsey. Formerly friends, these two merchants have

²⁹ Leggatt reads the trajectory of Jack Gresham with particular interest against the more typical narrative. In this case, he notes, we do not find the usual necessary phases of suffering and repentance. Rather, "[Jack's] prodigality is seen as part of the natural process of growing up, and he is evidently going to join the respectable world of prosperous citizens represented by his uncle – who was also prodigal in his youth" (43). My reading, however, takes more interest in what I see as the continued prodigality of the uncle, Sir Thomas Gresham.

fallen into a legal dispute for “sixe or seven yeare” (iii.412) over a Lordship both hoped to purchase. The men fight over property and the pride that property would feed. And yet, unlike Lucre and Hoard, the frenemy-usurers whose conflict fuels the action of *A Trick*, Sir Gresham and Sir Ramsey are here roundly criticized for their pride and the extravagance of litigation they indulge in perpetuating the dispute, particularly since their social status as important Citizens and wealthy Merchants confers on them the responsibility to serve as Benefactors to the City. Master Hobson, an honest Citizen shopkeeper focused on the city virtues of thrift and charity, regards Sir Gresham’s self-interested and contentious expenditure as “passing strange” observing to him, “were *Hobson* in your coate,/ Ere I’d consume a pennie amongst Lawyers,/ Ide giu’t poore people, bones a me I wold” (i.348-50). It is one of several criticisms of the much vaunted merchant in the play. Others orchestrate an intervention and reconciliation for the two men. Lady Ramsey, Sir Ramsey’s wife, ashamed that these “Men of the chiefest note within this Citie” should “be at such a iarre” (iii.3-4), involves “the reuerent Preacher Doctour Nowell” in the hope that he can reconcile the friends and remind them of their obligations to the city. Dean Nowell succeeds in reconciling the two men, reminding them of the affective ties and obligations between them: “With all my heart, long may you liue together,/ As friend should be to friend, brother to brother” (iii.533-34). Dean Nowell replaces discord over property and pride of place with amity and fraternity, turning strange relations to kind relations.

Dean Nowell serves as the play’s moral authority, instructing these great Citizens on the proper use of their riches. Their reconciliation is sealed with Dean Nowell’s hospitality, extended with an emphasis on its moderation: “ile entreat,/ My house may entertaine you for this time/ Where with such necessities wee le passe the time,/ As God shall best be pleased, and you contented:/ I keepe no ryot, nor looke for none,/ Only my table is for euery one” (iii.587-92).

Dean Nowell's hospitality sets up a model for hospitality that will later provide sharp relief for Sir Thomas Gresham's extravagant feast upon the christening of the Royal Exchange. Following this chaste dinner, Dean Nowell walks his guests through his gallery of charitable Citizens to remind these rich merchants of their obligations to their fellow men and to heaven, outlining the effects of such benevolence on social relations up and down the social hierarchy:

If you will follow the religious path,
That these haue beat before you, you shall win heauen,
Even in the mid-day walkes you shall not walke the street,
But widowes orisons, Laysars prayers, Orphans thanks,
Will flye into your eares, and with a ioyfull blush,
Make you thanke God that you haue done for them:
When otherwise theil fill you eares with curses,
Crying we feed on woe, you are our Nurses.
O ist not better that yong couples say,
You rais'd vs up, then you were our decay:
And mothers tongues teach their first borne to sing,
Of your good deeds, then by the bad to wring. (i.854-65)

Dean Nowell articulates the play's ideal for social relations in London's new commercial culture: that these Merchant-Citizens made rich by trade might remember their spiritual and communal obligations to those less fortunate, that their social relations might be governed by charity rather than the drive for further profit and upward mobility, that they turn away from their current practices described by Sir Gresham thus: "wee live like beasts, spend time and die,/ Leaving no good to be remembered by" (i.818-19). As in Middleton's city comedy, self-interested behavior is here associated with bestiality. Heywood's play, more earnest than Middleton's, is focused on finding a humane alternative by looking back to older models of charity, like those Dean Nowell and Lady Ramsey describe in the Gallery of Citizens.

And yet, even as the play celebrates Sir Gresham's historic building of the Royal Exchange as an act of great civic benefaction, the famous merchant is problematized as a model for virtuous liberality because his "charity" is represented as self-aggrandizing and extravagant.

Indeed, as a city benefactor, Sir Gresham proves a prodigal like his nephew. After the christening of the Royal Exchange, Sir Gresham hosts the Queen and various ambassadors, lords and ladies, and important Citizens at his home for a banquet. Contrary to Dean Nowell's modest hospitality, Gresham entreats his illustrious guests to "let our crown'd cups o'reflow with wine" (x.1428-29). A "Marchant and a Jeweller" comes to the banquet to offer a large, pearl to the Russian ambassador for the price of "fifteen hundred pound" (1475). Where the Russian ambassador finds it "too deare" (1479), Sir Gresham, who uses the royal "we" throughout this scene, considers purchasing the expensive jewel simply to show that, despite his many expenses for the Royal Exchange, he is not "bare of treasure at this time" (1484). In front of his guests, Gresham receives two devastating blows to his estate back to back. A ship carrying costly portraits of England's Kings commissioned by Gresham for his Royal Exchange is lost at sea. Gresham insists he cares only for the loss of these ornaments for his building and "car'd not to have lost their waights in gold" (1503). Next Gresham receives news that the new King of Barbary will neither honor the monopoly for sugar that he purchased for "three-score thousand pound," nor return the money (1511-22). The Lords attending the banquet fear the news will "vndoe" Gresham and make him wish "his buildings in his purse" (1524-27). And yet, Gresham makes light of his losses, joking that the Barbary King's gifts of slippers and a dagger were dearly purchased. Strangely emboldened by his losses, Sir Gresham purchases the jeweler's rare and expensive pearl in a histrionic show of extravagance:

Let's see thy pearle: goe pound it in a Morter
 Beate it to powder then returne it me,
 What Dukes, and Lordes, and these Ambassadors
 Have euen before our face refusd to purchase
 As of too high a price to venture on,
Gresham a London Marchant here will buy.
 What is it broken small? Fill us some wine,
 Fuller, yet fuller till the brim or'e-flows,

Here 16000. pound at one clap goes,
In stead of Sugar, *Gresham* drinkes this pearle
Vnto his Queene and Mistresse: pledge it Lords,
Who euer saw a Marchant brauelier fraught,
In dearer slippers or a richer draught? (x.1543-55)

Gresham's extravagance and pride are in clear violation of Dean Nowell's example of moderation and charity. If, as we saw Master Hobson suggest to Gresham, the money he spent on litigation would be better used on behalf of the poor, then certainly the same might be said of the money the merchant swallows in this show of gross extravagance. Despite Gresham's insistence that "I doe not this as prodigall of my wealth,/ Rather to shew how I esteeme that losse/ Which cannot be regain'd" (x.1559-61), his act certainly runs afoul of the Aristotelian model of good household management, normative in the period's household manuals, as a mean between excess and deficiency. Indeed, Sir Gresham's behavior would seem to enact the extremes of this model, to waste so extravagantly in the face of so much loss. And yet oddly, Sir Gresham's noble guests regard his rash actions as virtuous. "Lord 2" remarks that Gresham is "As royall in his vertues as his buildings" (x.1540), and Lord Ramsey assures his restored friend, "You are an honour to all English Merchants/ As bountifull as rich, as Charitable/ As rich as renowned as any of all" (1556-58).

The equation of prosperity and extravagance with nobility in the play is problematic. John Gresham's prodigality and bad behavior is repeatedly excused because it only proves him what he is, a gentleman and Sir Gresham's nephew. Sir Gresham's own take on the good citizenship Dean Nowell steers him towards simply glorifies the expenditure of great sums of money in the name of the Queen and her city. Indeed, when the Lords 1 and 2 and Sir Ramsey come to the Royal Exchange to "see his cost" (ix.1384), they agree that "this *Gresham* is a royall Cittizen" (1397). And yet, this royal Citizen proves a poor householder in the excess of his

hospitality, his self-aggrandizing charity far removed from the wants of the poor, and his lack of concern for thrift.

Sir Gresham is not the only bad householder in the play. Master Hobson, the populist shopkeeper who is quick to remind Sir Gresham of his obligations to the poor, is guilty of not recognizing his debt relation to an honest country chapman. The depersonalization of debt relations in the city is examined in the play as a failure of social relations, in particular it points to a lost sense of reciprocal obligation in relationships up and down the social hierarchy, between city and country, and between creditor and debtor. Though Hobson is friends with Sir Gresham, his humility and regard for the poor provide a contrast to the royal citizen's pride and self-aggrandizing benefaction. When he first addresses Sir Gresham, Hobson nostalgically recalls their humble connections to the country: "O *M. Gresham* t'was a golden world/ When we were Boyes, an honest Countrey-yeoman,/ Such as our fathers were, God rest their soules" (i.266-68). Hobson's answer to Gresham's and Ramsey's dispute over land is to do away with holding land as private property altogether: "You know the cause that this contention,/ Is only that he bought a peece of land/ This had giuen earnest for, all *Adams* earth,/ And *Adams* earth is free for *Adams* sonnes,/ And tis a shame men should contend for it:/ What ere you speake shall for a sentence stand,/ And being spoke, they shall shake hand in hand" (iii.494-500). Hobson's sympathies lie with the common man, specifically the country man alienated from land by enclosure. Furthermore, Hobson longs for the kind of trust that could be simply spoken and shook upon rather than the sort practiced in the city, requiring contracts and penalties. And yet, this former country yeoman is now Master Hobson, a successful city shopkeeper keeping strict account of his shop's debits and credits. His country virtues and his city business concerns come into conflict around a country chapman called Tawnicote.

This country chapman is a regular customer of Hobson's. He takes wares from the London shop on credit in order to sell them in the country. Then he returns with his profits to pay for the last parcel of goods and take out more. Hobson describes the cycle of their standing debt relationship: "sort out their wares: welcome's your due: Pay the old debt, and penne and incke for newe" (i.225-26). As Hobson's apprentices load up the chapman's pack with ten pounds worth of new wares, Hobson cheerfully inquires into "newes i' the Countrey" and "what Commodities/ are most respected with your countrie Girles" (i.228-30). The friendly dialogue between Hobson and the country chapman reflects Hobson's nostalgia for his own country origins and his tendency to compare the city unfavorably to the country. When Hobson hears that country girls and their husbands are taking up fashions similar to those in London, he remarks, "let the country pay/ well for their pride, tis *gratis* here at London,/ And that's the cause tis growne so generall" (i.254-56).

And yet, for all Hobson's respect for country virtues, country chapmans, and country news, he is a city shopkeeper. As it turns out, though the country chapman well knows his creditor's name – "God blesse you M. *Hobson*" (i.216) – Hobson does not know his debtor's to record it in his account book: "Bones a me, knaues,/ I have pa'yd soundly for my Countrey newes:/ What was his name?" (i.327-29). Hobson and his apprentices can only recall the country customer's outward habit, "a tawnie coate" (i.334), so they set the debt down in the books as "ten pound in trust vnto *Iohn Tawnicotee*" (i.336). When the chapman returns to repay his debt, an act he takes great pride in, the apprentices and Master Hobson do not remember him and because they do not have his real name in the books, "*Iohn Good-fellow*," they insist that he does not owe them money and treat him like a madman or a drunk. Indeed, for some time the apprentices refuse to take the honest chapman's money, even offering to give him money for "a pint of

Sacke” (i.1082). Proud of his good husbandry and good name, Good-fellow refuses to be turned away without paying his debt, and thinks this strange reception a “tricke to try my honestie” (i.1079-80).

The misunderstanding stems from different models of country trust and city trust. For Good-fellow, his word that he owes the shop ten pounds should be sufficient. As Hobson searches the book for one “*Iohn Good-fellow* of Kent” (i.1072), the country chapman insists that where he comes from, knowing his name would mean knowing him for a good and trustworthy fellow: “O sir, *Nomine & naturae*, by name and nature,/I am as well knowne for a good-fellow in Kent,/ As your Cittie Summer’s known for a knaue” (i.1073-75). But Hobson trusts only the record of his account book, despite his own earlier yearning for simple contracts between men of words spoken and hands shaken. Tawnicote/Good-fellow concludes that “here’s a mad household” proclaiming “master mad, men mad, and all mad” (i.1084-85). The madness that this city master and his apprentices suffer from is a higher regard for the account book than a man’s character and good name.

Only when one of the apprentices locates the entry for John Tawnicote and Good-fellow makes the connection to his apparel does the misunderstanding get sorted. Hobson applauds the chapman’s honesty and insists he take twenty pounds worth of ware on credit this time. However, Hobson still does not know Tawnicote for the Good-fellow he actually is. The relationship still relies on appearance rather than character. Good-fellow explains, “I was *Iohn Tawnie-cote* then,/ Though I am *Iohn Gray-cote* now” (i.1094-95). Hobson extends trust to the chapman using the wrong name once again: “Thou art honest *Iohn*, honest *Iohn Tawnie-cote*” (i.1103).

The bad, or as Tawnicote/Good-fellow would have it, “mad” household management caused by not knowing one’s debtor is a problem similar in some respects to those unkind and unnatural households we have seen in which parents and suitors are blind to the desires, affections, or true characters of their kin and would-be spouses. As in the earlier city comedies examined in this chapter, here characters are led by their self-interested pursuit of economic profit and enhanced social status. Though Hobson does not pursue upward social mobility in the way his fellow Citizens Sir Gresham and Sir Ramsey do, his careful focus on thrift, which has given him considerable credit in the city, as Sir Gresham observes (i.338-39), leads him to rely on the impersonal instruments of trade rather than developing a knowledge of his recurring customers. Tawnicote/Good-fellow’s recurring business, friendly discourse, and regular timely repayment of his monthly bill has generated no credit for him or his word; Hobson has not even learned his name.

Hobson experiences the flip side of this city problem when he becomes a creditor to the Queen. Immediately following his misunderstanding with Tawnicote/Good-fellow, a messenger arrives with “this fauour” for Master Hobson: “My royall Mistresse *Queene Elizabeth*,/ Hath sent to borrow a hundred pound of you” (i.1111-13). Hobson receives the message as the highest honor *and* as evidence that he is known to the Queen: “How bones a mee, *Queene* know *Hobson*, *Queene* know *Hobson*?/ And send but for one hundred pound: Friend come in;/ Come in friend, shall have two, *Queene* shall have two:/ If *Queene* know *Hobson*, once her *Hobsons* purse,/ Must be free for her she is Englands Nurse” (i.1114-19). Hobson describes the privilege of lending the Queen money as an obligation as well: since she is England’s nurse, he must be her purse. And yet, it is primarily the idea that the Queen *knows* Hobson that the shopkeeper harps on, such that

when Hobson has the opportunity to address the Queen in person, he is shocked she does not know him, and it is in this exchange that we get the play's title line:

<i>Hobson</i>	God blesse thy Grace Queene <i>Besse</i> .
<i>Queen</i>	Friend, what are you?
<i>Hobson</i>	Knowest thou not mee Queene? Then thou knowest no body:/ Bones a me Queen, I am <i>Hobson</i> , and old <i>Hobson</i> / By the Stockes, I am sure you know me.
<i>Queen</i>	What is he Leicester, dooest thou know this fellow? <i>Gresham</i> or you?
<i>Gresham</i>	May it please your Maiestie,/ He is a rich substantiall substantiall Citizen.
<i>Hobson</i>	Bones a me woman send to borrow money/ Of one you doe not know, there's a new tricke. (xiii.2069-79)

Hobson's address to the Queen is notably chummy, much like Tawnicote/Good-fellow's to him, suggesting the one-sided assumption in each case that their debt relation is also a familiar and affective relation. Hobson's dismay in learning that the Queen's request for money had nothing to do with her knowledge of him or his character, that indeed she had no knowledge of him despite his generous response of doubling the sum which the Queen had requested, also mirrors Tawnicote/Good-fellow's own frustration that Master Hobson did not after all their dealings know him for a Good-fellow. Though Tawnicote/Good-fellow feels a strong sense of obligation to repay his debt to Master Hobson and Hobson in turn recognizes his duty to serve as his Queen's purse, neither Hobson nor the Queen meet these payments with a reciprocal recognition of what they owe, respectively, a loyal country customer and a Citizen subject, beyond expressions of thanks.

Thus it is specifically social relations moving down the social hierarchy that suffer from a lack of knowing and a lost sense of owing in this play. The Queen does not know her loyal Citizen subject, and the prosperous Citizen shopkeeper does not know his loyal country debtor. The "charity" of the city's wealthiest Citizen benefactor (his Royal Exchange and his college) is

dramatized in terms of excess associated with the aristocracy with no gestures towards the city's poor.

For all the play's emphasis on the charity of great Citizens, the first true instance of charity in the play comes from the country and from the character who occupies perhaps the lowest social position in the play, the "honest" country chapman, Tawnicote/Good-fellow. Interestingly, this act of charity, like Sir Gresham's, results in bad household management. The countryside has fallen onto hard times due to bad harvests, and Tawnicote/Good-fellow uses the twenty pounds worth of goods he received from Hobson on credit to help relieve his neighbors: "The goods you trusted mee withal, I haue not wasted/ In ryot and excesse, but my kind heart,/ Seeing my helpelesse neighbours in distresse,/ By reason of the long and extreame dearth,/ Some I relieued, some trusted with my goods,/ Whose pouerties not able to repay./ Then beare with me a little, your rich store/ Hath sav'd my life and fed a hundredth more" (xi.1649-56). The chapman's kindhearted charity violates the careful thrift he exemplified earlier in the play as Hobson's honest customer. When one of Hobson's apprentices tries to load his pack with new commodities on credit, Tawnicote/Good-fellow insists that he balance his account first: "Nay prethee not too fast, let's pay for the old before we talke of any new" (i.1007-8). And yet, importantly, Tawnicote/Good-fellow's unthrift is neither prideful nor excessive; on the contrary, one might call Tawnicote/Good-fellow's unthrift charitable to the point of being self-defeating. By lending to his neighbors in need the wares that were lent to him to sell for profit, the chapman both loses his livelihood and the ability to repay the debt he owes Hobson. The chapman is reduced to digging in the stoney ground from sunup to sundown to earn "three-pence by the day" for his family's maintenance, slowly putting away what he can to attempt to make some

restitution on the debt, living in fear of the day his creditor decides to seek his arrest and dislodge his family from their home.

Tawnicote/Good-fellow's charity is kind-hearted and moored in a strong sense of obligation to one's neighbors which the play repeatedly associates with the country in contrast to the city. And yet, its self-sacrificing quality, like Antonio's lending in *The Merchant of Venice*, makes it a troubled model for virtuous household management, like Sir Gresham's hospitality and benefaction, and Hobson's account-book thrift. Tawnicote/Goodfellow's charity is unsustainable and has served to cast himself into the same predicament as his suffering neighbors. Furthermore, the once cheerful chapman known for a Good-fellow in Kent now turns a sour eye on the hardness of the world and men's hearts:

Hard world, when men dig liuing out of stones,
As wretched miserable I am inforc't:
And yet there liues more pittie in the earth,
Then in the flinty-bosomes of her children,
For she's content to haue her aged brest
Mangled with matrocks, rent and torne with spades,
To giue her children and their children bread,
When man more flinty then her stonie Ribbes
That was their mother, neither by intreates,
Teares, nor complaints will yield them sustenance,
But tis our ages fault the mightier,
Teare liuing out of vs, we out of her. (xi.1577-89)

Tawnicote/Goodfellow is here turned cousin to Shakespeare's and Middleton's misanthropic Timon who seeks refuge in the wilds of the savage earth to escape the vicious self-interestedness of society. Like Timon, the chapman finds more generosity in the offerings of the hard earth than in the hearts of his fellow men once he defaults on his debts. For him, both the lack of charity he finds in humanity and the violence with which a paltry living must be eked out of the dirt are signs of the times. As we will see with Timon in the next chapter, for Tawnicote, humanity's cruelty is born of a hard and savage mother earth, and yet men far surpass the indifference of

their flinty-ribbed mother, whose generosity is itself a kind of violence. In this sense, the harsh economic conditions from which the countryside and Tawnicote suffer, and which Hobson finds unrecognizable, are described in terms of unkind and unnatural family relations. Children must rent and tear their mother's "aged brest" in order to feed themselves and their children, so why should it be surprising that these same children tear their livings out of one another as well?

Thus when Tawnicote recognizes his creditor Hobson, he expects the worst: that the city shopkeeper has come to the country in order to arrest him and exact the full measure of the law against him and his family: "I broke my day with him, O had that fatall houre/ Broken me heart [...] / And he for that default hath sew'd my bill,/ And with an execution is come downe/ To seaze my household stuffe, imprison me,/ And turn my wife and children out of dores" (xi.1614-20).

And yet, Hobson neither recognizes the countryside around him, nor his country debtor. The landscape is shrouded in "a thick myst" and what the city shopkeeper does make out is suggestive of a countryside transformed by the privatization of land and its economic effects: "I walked abroad to take the mornings ayre,/ And I am out of knowledge , bones a me/ What Meads and what Inclosures haue we here" (xi.1590-93). Wandering through this mist, Hobson nostalgically recalls tales his grandmother told him "of Fayries and Hobgoblins/ That would lead milke-maides ouer hedge and ditch,/ Make them milke their M. neighbours kine" and suspects that it is "this *Robin Godfellow*" that now leads him "up and downe the mad mans maze" (xi.1603-10). It is unclear whether the mischievous Robin Good-fellow is in this instance a force for neighborly support or theft, that is, whether the maid is led to rob the neighbor of his cow's milk, or to do her neighbor's work of harvesting it. However, the reference comes just before Hobson encounters Tawnicote/Good-fellow suggesting a parallel between the country sprite and

this country chapman. As in his shop, Hobson once again does not know his debtor: “A Debter of mine, mother of me thou lyest,/ I know thee not, nor doe I know this place:/ If thou owest me any thing, pay mee with thy loue,/ And if thou beest acquainted in these woods,/ Conduct me to some Towne, or direct roade/ That leads to Londone, and ile here discharge thee/ Of debts and duties, and beside impart/ Somewhat to cherish thee” (xi.1634-41). Tawnicote does end up playing Robin Good-fellow to Hobson then by leading him through the mist to the nearest town – and by leading Hobson to an act of charity. Hobson finally recognizes his debtor as the man he once called Tawnicote and feels certain when his debtor leads him safely to the town of Deptford that the coincidence is no accident: “Bones a me, to Detford came I to doe charitie:/ I see t’was Gods appointment” (xi.1691700).

Hobson’s nostalgic return to the countryside reveals a landscape rendered unrecognizable, unknowable, by economic hardship. Through his relationship to his debtor, Tawnicote, Hobson is able to see the suffering of the country in relation to the prosperity of the city: “in thy words as in a looking-glasse,/ I see the toyle and trauell of the country,/ and quiet gaine of cities blessedesse” (xi.1679-81). In the country, Hobson is reminded of his obligations to his country-debtor, to know him and recognize him as such in the first place, but also to extend the “quiet gaine” of the city to those who labor and suffer in the country.

This turn is one that corrects in some ways the play’s examples of unbalanced approaches to hospitality, charity, and thrift, and its problems with knowing and owing. Though Dean Nowell laments that “Great is the number of the rich in shew/ About the Citie, but of the charitable,/ There are but few” (xiv.2123-25), several of the play’s characters number among this virtuous minority after Hobson’s journey through the countryside with Tawnicote/Good-fellow. Following this excursion, Hobson sets about spreading his charity amongst those in need. Lady

Ramsey observes, “He hath rais’d many falling, but especially/ One master Rowland, one cal’d Tawnicote:/ But now an able Citizen late chosen/ A Maister of the Hospitall” (xiv.2128-31). The charity that Tawnicote first exemplifies, though he can little afford it, proves infectious and ultimately sustainable since it influences Citizens of means, like Hobson, to “raise” falling men like himself, who will pay it forward, as we imagine Tawnicote will as Master of the Hospital. Hobson also intervenes in the execution of Timothy Thinbeard for stealing money from him, insisting on one of the play’s central tenets: “A hundred thousand pound cannot make a man:/ A hundred shall not hang one by my meanes:/ Men are more worth then monie” (xiv.2179-81).

Though we do not see Sir Gresham engaged in a more moderate and poor-relief focused model of charity in the latter half of the play, his counterpart Sir Ramsey, who once squandered his fortune on prideful litigation over the purchase of a country estate, does take up this model as he faces his own mortality. Lady Ramsey praises this change: “It cheer’s my heart, now in his deepe of sicknesse,/ He is so charitable, and so well addicted/ Vnto the poore’s reliefe” (xiv.2120-21).

The play’s concluding scenes move away from the commercial world of the city altogether, focusing on the Queen’s management of her court and her kingdom. Here we see the Queen blunder in the management of her court by not knowing “Doctor Paries” treasonous character. And then we see the Queen correct her previous blunders by pointedly knowing the name and character of her subject and England’s savior after the battle of the Armada: “*Drake*, for well I kowne (sic) thy name,/ And ile not be vnmindful of thy worth” (xviii.2650-51).

The arc of Heywood’s *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody, Part 2* bends toward an optimistic view of social relations up and down the social hierarchy, between the city and country, and between creditor and debtor, but not without first examining the way London’s

commercial culture threatens to foreclose on the reciprocity of vertical social relations and to turn important household and civic virtues, such as hospitality, charity, and thrift, to excessive and self-interested vice.

A New Way to Pay Old Debts

The printed text of Massinger's play signals his class sympathies before the first act even begins. The play is dedicated "To the Right Honorable Robert, Earl of Carnarvon, Master Falconer of England." Not only is the dedicatee an Earl but one who perhaps most symbolizes the leisurely sporting life of a country nobleman. Massinger's play is full of admiration and nostalgia for the well-managed country estate headed by a virtuous and liberal master or mistress and supported by loving and loyal servants and good reciprocal relations with neighbors of all social ranks.³⁰ As the play opens, however, we see that this world of careful stewardship, generous hospitality, and stable hierarchical relations is under threat from the tropes of city comedy.³¹

Though the stage directions tell us we are in "the countryside near Nottingham" (1.1), the opening scene reads more like one set in a Cheapside tavern in London. Frank Wellborn is being denied "booze" and "tobacco" by the proprietors of the local alehouse, Tapwell and his wife Froth. Wellborn is the play's central prodigal, a diminished nobleman and heir at the nadir of his prodigal plot when the play begins. Though Wellborn has managed to avoid debtors' prison and

³⁰ Massinger is commonly understood as especially concerned with "the tension between stasis and dynamics, immobility and change" particularly in the context of the political climate during the long lead up to the Civil War (Homem, 214).

³¹ Leggatt points out that Massinger borrows the skeleton of Middleton's intrigue plot from *A Trick to Catch the Old One* for this play, an observation that is widely noted by critics. For Leggatt, the combination of city comedy intrigue plot, with its delight in city knavery, and Massinger's earnest assertion of aristocratic values (birth and breeding over money) does not work (65-67).

the Hole (perhaps because he is in the countryside rather than the city), his prodigality has reduced him to rags and to asking for sustenance for which he cannot pay.

Tapwell's denial of Wellborn is not simply a matter of thrift. The tapster takes pleasure in denying Wellborn, taunting his poverty and disgrace and threatening to have him arrested, presumably for vagrancy and begging. Wellborn scorns Tapwell's cruelty, reminding him that despite his current circumstances, the tapster is in his debt:

<i>Wellborn</i>	Why, thou unthankful villain, dar'st thou talk thus? Is not thy house, and all thou hast, my gift?
<i>Tapwell</i>	I find it not in chalk, and Timothy Tapwell/ Does keep no other register. (1.1.23-6)

The exchange sets up two separate registers of debt: those paid with money, and those paid with affection – love, loyalty, gratitude. In this country play, characters are plagued by the former due to city usurers, but it is the noble and specifically country virtue of remembering the latter that saves the play's protagonist, Wellborn, and his fellow country nobility.

Tapwell was a “drudge” in Wellborn's father's house and served as Wellborn's under-butler when he became his dead father's heir. Wellborn reminds him, “'Twas I that, when I heard thee swear if ever/ Thou couldst arrive at forty pounds thou wouldst/ Live like an emperor, 'twas I that gave it/ In ready gold” (1.1.77-80). Tapwell used this forty pounds to buy a “small cottage,” marry and begin his alehouse, and now in his modest success, and his former master's ruin, the ambitious tapster chooses to keep only those accounts that can be recorded with chalk, paid in ready coin, and wiped away. The debt Tapwell owes Wellborn cannot be cleared. More than the forty pounds, he owes gratitude, loyalty, and the hospitality Wellborn requests. Wellborn beats Tapwell for his forgetfulness, for not remembering those longstanding affective debts that bind them.

But Tapwell remembers well enough to recite Wellborn's own history to him. Wellborn's father had been all that a country nobleman should be. He was "a man of worship, Old Sir John Wellborn, Justice of Peace and Quorum/ And stood to be *Custos Rotulorum*,/ Bare the whole sway of the shire, kept a great house,/ Relieved the poor, and so forth" (1.1.34-7). Old Sir John Wellborn was the ideal of the country nobleman, and then Frank Wellborn inherited. Tapwell reminds him, "You had a merry time of't – hawks and hounds,/ With choice of running horses, mistresses/ Of all sorts and all sizes – yet so hot/ As their embraces made your lordships melt./ Which your uncle, Sir Giles Overreach, observing,/ Resolving not to lose a drop of 'em/ On foolish mortgages, statues, and bonds,/ For a while supplied your looseness, and then left you" (1.1.44-51). Wellborn went the way of the typical city comedy prodigal, with the help of a typical city-comedy usurer-uncle. And yet here, these tropes are deployed with far less lightness and humor than we are used to encountering them; they signify dangers that threaten the aristocracy.

Wellborn meets this recitation of his past with a deep sense of shame before jogging Tapwell's memory of his own role as beneficiary in his debauchery: "since you are grown forgetful, I will help/ Your memory, and tread thee into mortar,/ Not leave one bone unbroken" (1.1.87-9). The violence and cruelty between the two men is not unknown in city comedy (here we find the typical bestial aspersions being exchanged: "dog", "viper"), but the conflict reads more ominously than it might in a more typical city comedy. Wellborn's losses and fall are disastrous and Tapwell's betrayal deeply cruel. The conflict is both one between the account book and the heart, and the past and the present, and it bodes nothing less than the decay of a social order which Massinger, and presumably his patron, are deeply interested in preserving. Though both Tapwell and Wellborn are shown to be at fault, Tapwell's failure to honor former

relationships, and the debts incurred therein, makes him the villain in the exchange: “What I was, sir, it skills not./ What you are is apparent” (1.1.29-30). Tapwell’s focus on the present is equated with his ambition. Recently made a street cleaner in his parish, Tapwell ironically aspires to one day “be overseer of the poor” (1.1.66-8) even as he denies his poor former master the charity he requests. Here the social virtue of charity functions as a signifier of upward class mobility rather than a recognition of the bonds between neighbors. As with *If You Know Not Me*, self-interested class aspirations co-opt and pervert household and civic virtues such as charity, hospitality and thrift. Most significantly, this first scene establishes that remembering one’s debts, particularly those inscribed in the heart, is the central virtue of the play.

Lady Allworth is a model of such remembrance. A noble widow who heads a well-ordered household full of devoted servants and well-fed guests, Lady Allworth is admired for her virtue, expressed most clearly in her long mourning for her deceased husband. Hounded by suitors, the rich widow gives “liberal entertainment” (1.1.114) but prefers the solitude of her mourning to her full dinner table. Lady Allworth’s devotion to her late husband extends to her step-son, Tom Allworth, who praises her as “my patroness” and “my all” (1.1.99). In this chapter’s review of unkind familial relations, Lady Allworth’s devotion stands out. As Tom Allworth observes, “There are few such stepdames” (1.1.103). Lady Allworth’s household is something like the brief description we get of Wellborn’s father’s household. It is the ideal country estate – liberal and yet well-ordered – headed by a virtuous mistress who commands the obedience and devotion of her servants. In all respects, Lady Allworth’s good household management is the counterpoint to Frank Wellborn’s prodigal ruin of his father’s estate. Where his credit has collapsed to the point of eliciting outright contempt from former servants, as we see in the opening scene, Lady Allworth’s reputation is gold in the country – for her virtue, her

liberality, and her solvency. It is this currency of Lady Allworth's reputation that is central to Wellborn's new way to pay old debts.

There is little "new" about a prodigal using a rich widow to restore his credit. We have seen rumored or realized marriages to real or feigning rich widows at the center of most of the city comedies in this chapter.³² Wellborn's strategy differs somewhat in that what he actually trades on is the remembrance of a real debt of affection the widow owes him. The Lady Allworth's late husband was a dear friend to Wellborn, and all Wellborn asks is that he be received in her household as a guest.³³ Wellborn's strategy centers on the restoration of kindness, then, rather than land or money, though this is certainly the end he has in mind. He asks only to be extended the hospitality that Lady Allworth extends all her guests, even the predatory usurer Sir Giles Overreach. And yet, before Wellborn is granted his simple suite, he has to remind Lady Allworth and her household of the debt of kindness between them, for even this idealized noble household and mistress forget their obligations when confronted with Wellborn's rags and the debauchery behind them.

When Wellborn first visits the Allworth household he is roundly denied acknowledgement and respect. His first encounter is with Lady Allworth's guest, Sir Giles Overreach, the usurer – and uncle – to whom he has lost his lands and wealth.

Overreach [...] Who have we here?
Wellborn You know me.

³² Indeed, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* is often compared to Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* in which the prodigal Witgood restores his credit by circulating rumors that he is going to marry a rich widow who is actually his Curtizan. The differences between the two plays are many, but the central scheme to restore credit based merely on the rumor of marriage to a rich widow, rather than the actual attempt to marry a rich widow, is the same.

³³ We do not actually hear Wellborn ask his favor of Lady Allworth, but it seems clear that this is what he asks since he says his suit is that "which you deny not/ to strangers" (1.3.124-25), Lady Allworth is surprised at his request for so little, "Fie, nothing else?" (126), and then Wellborn follows up by inviting Overreach's man Marall to join him as a dinner guest at Lady Allworth's house.

Overreach I did once, but now I will not;/ Thou art no blood of mine. Avaunt, thou beggar! If ever thou presume to own me more,/ I'll have thee caged and whipped. (1.3.39-43)

Overreach is another usurer-uncle who denies his kinship once the prodigal-nephew no longer has means or credit to exploit. Overreach supports his denial of kinship with the observation that Wellborn is “no blood of mine,” an important point for this play that privileges those characters born into nobility over those, like Overreach, who aspire to it through mortgages and marriages.³⁴ Later when Overreach greets Wellborn with, “Hency, monster! Prodigy!” (2.1.90), Wellborn identifies himself through a clear account of his claim to Overreach’s kinship and acknowledgement: “Sir, your wife’s nephew;/ She and my father tumbled in one belly” (91-2). Massinger deploys the uncle-usurer trope so that Overreach’s predatory behavior registers as an example of kinship rendered unkind by the profit and social mobility motive, but he emphasizes that the relation is by marriage and not by blood in order to distinguish Wellborn’s character, and pedigree, from Overreach’s who is (beyond the typical city comedy usurer) a cruel and atheistic villain and not of noble stock.³⁵

Back at Lady Allworth’s house, Wellborn is rudely greeted and asked to leave by each of Lady Allworth’s servants – Watchall, Order, Amble, and Furnace – who are otherwise accustomed to receive all guests, even strangers, with kindness and hospitality. Tom Allworth, Lady Allworth’s step-son, informs his friend Wellborn that “we must be strangers/ Nor would I have you seen here for a million” (1.3.52-3). Lady Allworth’s waiting-woman and chambermaid

³⁴ Rui Carvalho Homem notes that Massinger’s work as a whole contains a “persistent focus on traditional notions of social and political legitimacy. [His plays] are often expressed as denunciations of the decline in respect for the primacy of birth and heredity as sources of power and deference” (215).

³⁵ Overreach’s characterization is a blatant example of the way anxieties concerning social mobility and the changing economic order often played out as a kind of soft class warfare. Leinwand observes, “Under the guise of a traditional claim for order and hierarchy, the antibourgeois literature evoked images of a predatory merchant class set on devouring a defenseless gentry” (31).

mock him as a “creature/ made out of the privy” (1.3.55). Lady Allworth herself initially denies him “that noble usage” he requests as “the true friend of your husband” (74). She perceives and desires only distance between them where Wellborn claims a connection and a debt: “Thou son of infamy, forbear my house,/ And know and keep the distance that’s between us,/ Or, though it be against my gentler temper,/ I shall take order you no more shall be/ An eyesore to me”

(1.3.81-4). Lady Allworth’s initial response to Wellborn differs little from that of Overreach’s, the play’s villain. Though she has played no part in his fall, as Overreach has, her initial refusal to acknowledge and honor the ties between them is a failing, as Wellborn soon shows. The lady’s description of him as an eyesore suggests the degree to which the visible, and sensory, manifestations of his fallen state lead his neighbors to forget his noble blood. He reminds her that despite the difference in their outer trappings – “these rags, with my poverty” and “those costly jewels,/ And those rich clothes you wear” (1.3.90-4), “the blood that runs in this arm is as noble/ As that which fills your veins” (1.3.89-90). Furthermore, he reminds her that those sins he has been guilty of are the same as those of her beloved husband, that when the late Allworth had reached a similar point of destitution, it was himself who “set him upright” so that he might marry the rich Lady Allworth. Her devoted remembrance of the late Lord Allworth had, it seems, originally excluded this bit of unsavory history. Once reminded, Lady Allworth acknowledges the debt she owes Wellborn: “For what’s past, excuse me;/ I will redeem it. – Order, give the gentleman/ A hundred pounds” (1.3.119-21). Lady Allworth attempts to repay Wellborn with money, but he will accept only the hospitality owed to her husband’s true friend. And so, the remembrance of debts past, particularly of affective debts, is set up as the play’s central virtue, a virtue associated here with the nobility and the country, used to defeat the predatory machinations of a base-born city usurer.

Massinger dramatizes the ethos of city comedy – the rise of commercial culture and the intrusion of economic relations into the family, household, and neighborhood – as a class conflict between city moneylenders and country gentry. This conflict is perpetrated in the play by Overreach and his creatures, Marall and Greedy. More developed as a villain than many city comedy usurers, Overreach articulates his motivations quite clearly.³⁶ He accumulates land and wealth, using any means necessary, even burning the barns and destroying the crops of frugal farmers who refuse to sell or mortgage their land (2.1.34-42), all toward the end of marrying his daughter Margaret to a lord and having her served by “decayed” nobility:

She must part with/ That humble title, and write “Honorable,”
 “Right Honorable,” Marall, my “Right Honorable” daughter,
 If all I have, or e’er shall get, will do it.
 I will have her well attended; there are ladies
 Of errant knights decayed and brought so low
 That, for cast clothes and meat, will gladly serve her.
 And ‘tis my glory, though I come from the city,
 To have their issue, whom I have undone,
 To kneel to mine as bondslaves. (2.1.74-83)

Overreach’s social and economic aspirations come together in this title he covets for his daughter. Lest we misconstrue him as a doting father focused on his daughter’s well-being, Massinger directly links Overreach’s satisfaction in raising his daughter’s station in life to enslaving those “decayed” ladies who serve her, thereby relishing just how low he has brought their noble fathers (2.1.85). Overreach describes his peculiar desire as simply “a rich man’s pride, there having ever been/ More than a feud, a strange antipathy/ Between us and true gentry” (2.1.87-9). This “strange antipathy” is an important backdrop for the play, though Overreach seems at times to be the only participant in the feud. Lady Allworth receives the usurer as a guest at her dinner table, and Lord Lovell’s, the play’s ideal of aristocratic masculinity, accepts

³⁶ Homem suggests that Overreach’s desire for social mobility is represented by Massinger “as fundamentally disruptive and potentially criminal” (216).

Overreach's invitation to visit his home. And yet, Overreach's entrée into country society extends only so far. Loyalties and adherence to affective debts that bind the play's gentry ultimately defeat Overreach's socio-economic endgame.

Lord Lovell is a wealthy and noble lord heading soon for the wars in the low countries. He serves as the play's ideal of aristocratic manhood, defined by the battlefield rather than the marketplace. Lady Allworth's step-son, Tom, diminished by Overreach like Wellborn, serves Lord Lovell, who, in keeping with the central virtue of the play, never forgets his servant's noble blood. Lovell acknowledges Allworth's zealous love, service, and gratitude (3.1.18-21). Allworth describes Lovell's care of him as "more like a father to me than a master" (3.1.30). The relationship is the play's best example of the kind of affective debt relation in which these country gentry specialize, and with which Overreach cannot compete. Consistent with the tropes of city comedy, Tom Allworth happens to be in love with Margaret Overreach, his usurer's daughter. When Overreach pursues Lovell as a match for Margaret, Lovell promises Allworth not only to resist the match, but to manage things so that Allworth can marry her instead. And yet, Lovell's seemingly noble gesture of passing up Margaret's rich dowry has as much to do with his loyalty to his own kind as to his devoted and besotted servant. As he explains to Lady Allworth, "I would not so adulterate my blood/ By marrying Margaret, and so leave my issue/ Made up of several pieces, one part scarlet/ And the other London blue. In my tomb/ I will inter my name first" (4.1.222-26). Lovell's sentiments are welcome news to Lady Allworth who quite agrees with them. Indeed, they reflect the normative aristocratic values celebrated by Massinger with this play.

Lady Allworth delivers a brief treatise on the matter in her dialogue with Lovell:

As you are noble, howe'er common men
Make sordid wealth the object and sole end

Of their industrious aims, 'twill not agree
With those of eminent blood, who are engaged
More to prefer their honors than to increase
The state left to 'em by their ancestors,
To study large additions to their fortunes
And quite neglect their births; though I must grant
Riches well got to be a useful servant,
But a bad master. (4.1.179-88)

Lady Allworth spells out an ethos contrary to that of city comedy. Among the country gentry of Massinger's play, honor is the most important currency. Nobility masters wealth, using it as one of many good servants, rather than being mastered by its gain or its loss. Lovell's loyalty to his devoted (and *noble*) servant Allworth is of a piece with his loyalty to his own *kind*. As Lovell indicates, he is ever mindful of these distinctions: "I can make/ A fitting difference between my footboy/ And a gentleman by want compelled to serve me" (3.1.26-8). Even Margaret understands that she is no match for Lord Lovell: "There's too much disparity/ Between his quality and mine to hope it" (3.2.101-2). Accordingly, Lord Lovell marries Lady Allworth, his obvious social counterpart in the world of the play.³⁷

The affective ties that bind the play's country characters are wrapped up in this loyalty to kind that is, to our modern perspective, less sympathetic than we might expect the antithesis to Overreach's economic predations to be. And yet, class loyalty is loyalty nonetheless and a kind of friendship. Once Lady Allworth remembers Wellborn's noble blood and the debt she owes her late husband's true friend, she becomes a friend indeed to him – opening her home to him, keeping him in her own previously guarded presence, making his introduction to the other households of the county – even as her kindnesses are misconstrued and rumors threaten her

³⁷ Leinwand notes one of the social conditions behind the urgency of these distinctions between nobility and the merchant class: "The London merchant's income and net worth appear to have risen considerably throughout this period – the income of nobles and courtiers was falling sharply. This economic leveling among merchants, landed gentry, and nobility paradoxically produced a desire in each group to differentiate itself as clearly as it could from the others" (38).

good name. Lovell follows through on his word to Allworth, securing Margaret as his wife and releasing him from service to be his own master once again. By the play's conclusion, all of the play's country characters are more entwined in never-to-be-paid-off debts of gratitude and devotion than ever, suggesting a social network all the stronger for Overreach's city schemes.

Meanwhile, Overreach, who begins the play having ruined his nephew and denying his kinship, soon recognizes no one but himself. It is clear long before Margaret leaves her father to marry Allworth that her role is merely a function of Overreach's hatred. When Margaret expresses sympathy for her new servant, "The Lady Downfall'n," Overreach threatens to disown her: "Part with these humble thoughts, and apt thyself/ To the noble state I labor to advance thee,/ Or, by my hopes to see thee "Honorable,"/ I will adopt a stranger to my heir/ And throw thee from my care" (3.2.57-61). Indeed, when Overreach learns of Margaret's clandestine marriage to Allworth, he attempts to kill her. He is cruel and ungrateful to his creature, Marall, treating him as a "slave" and "a subject only fit for beating" (5.1.96-7). For Overreach, "Friendship is but a word" (2.1.22). Like Tapworth in the play's opening scene, Overreach keeps only one kind of register, and it does not include debts of kinship, friendship, or loyal service. Indeed, we learn that Tapworth's cruel treatment of Wellborn was instigated by Overreach, who threatened people in the county against aiding him in any way. In his final madness, Wellborn reveals how deep his lack of connection to others runs: "Why, is not the whole world/ Included in myself? To what use then/ Are friends and servants?" (5.1.356-57). Fittingly, while it is the loyalty of the gentry to one another that defeats Overreach's schemes, it is his servant Marall's betrayal that ultimately undoes the old usurer.

With the play's conclusion, Wellborn, all but restored to his former state, demands to see the deed in which his lands were originally mortgaged to Overreach. When Overreach produces

the document, sure he will soon possess Lady Allworth's lands to boot, he discovers no ink on the deed, and therefore no record of the transaction that once signed all of Wellborn's lands over to him. Marall, Overreach's personal notary as well as his creature, used a disappearing ink to record the usurer's transactions, and now his revenge comes to fruition. Paired with the news of Margaret's clandestine marriage, Overreach goes mad, scorns god, and falls into a distraction from which it appears he will not recover. Marall's revenge is a kind of poetic justice that mimics Overreach's own forgetting of affective debts, and just to drive the point home, Marall is roundly condemned for betraying his master even though his actions save the day.³⁸ The ever-beaten Marall is literally kicked out of the closing scene by the loyal servants of Lady Allworth's household, with this reminder for the audience: "This is the haven/ False servants still arrive at" (5.1.351-52).

Like the city comedies above and Heywood's chronicle history, Massinger's play is concerned with the way the commercial ethos, predatory appetites, and social mobility of city life threaten the affective ties that undergird the traditional social order. However, here these affective ties are shown to be the special province of the country gentry and nobility who possess the power to defeat these new-fangled socio-economic forces if they choose to remember their obligations to one another. Though Wellborn's setting differs from that of his fellow debtor-protagonists, his cleverness and ability to defeat the unkind and unnatural reorganization of affective relationships between households and up and down the social hierarchy are the same.

³⁸ Leggatt finds this device "trivial." He complains, "Overreach is such a powerful villain that one would like to see him defeated by something more significant than a chemical reaction" (68). My reading's focus on the remembrance of bonds restores the significance and justice of this device.

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The constant irony of the early modern texts we have been considering in this study is how the language of economic debt and that of these fundamental affective and “natural” debts points up the antagonism between the two. In his genre-defining study of Jacobean city comedy, Brian Gibbons suggested that though city comedy advances no holistic social theory, it anticipates the work of Hobbes “in presenting an image of the times through opposed ideas and opposed experiences set in increasingly complex patterns of interaction; furthermore, while some of these promise the possibility of resolution or reconciliation through the medium of comedy, others, interestingly, do not.”<sup>39</sup> Gail Kern Paster’s study of the early modern idea of the city also points to this definitive opposition of ideas or forces. Tracing the double image of the idealized and the vilified always contained within representations of the city, she writes, “This double image of good and evil cities reveals the city as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, the single archetype for warring social premises.”<sup>40</sup> This chapter finds that the often opposed obligations of debt as love and debt as money do find reconciliation through the medium of comedy, but not in a manner that altogether alleviates the threats posed by the tendency to conflate or intentionally confuse the two.

Across these plays, self-interest and the fraud and tricks that enable its ends of satisfying appetites and effecting swift changes in fortune, are viewed with varying degrees of pleasure and horror.<sup>41</sup> Middleton’s and Cooke’s city comedies revel somewhat in the chaos of the city’s

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<sup>39</sup> Gibbons, 16-17. In a somewhat more optimistic vein, Stock and Zwierlein express the genre’s tensions in this way: “At its best, city comedy dramatizes the tensions between the opposing, often contradictory forces of tradition and novelty, participation and exclusivity, communal vision and social division, collective rites and private leisure, bounty and thrift” (18).

<sup>40</sup> Paster, *Idea of the City*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Leggatt too notes this mixed response vices and trickery of city comedy: “There is a keen awareness of the knavery of the world, an awareness in which there is often as much relish as criticism” (9).

constantly shapeshifting socialscape. To some extent, both the gullers and the gulled, however deeply implicated in the predatory appetites and vices of the city's commercial culture, carry the promise of the possibility of change and likely reflect back to the play's original audiences exaggerated representations of desires or temptations that they recognize in their own city lives.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, even these playful imaginings of the new economics' potential for social transformations ultimately adhere in their comedic trajectories to a mostly conventional model of social stability. In the conclusions of these plays, economic triumphs are typically a matter of restoration to "rightful" or otherwise "deserving" possessors. These protagonists stand out as such due to a combination of characteristics that might include some degree of class standing, original ownership of a lost patrimony, a cleverness that enables them to out-manipulate the appetites and motivations of less clever players in the city game, and importantly, some recognition of the importance of affective obligation as more than a rhetorical tool for manipulating economic debt relations.<sup>43</sup> Despite this typical conservative step back in their

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<sup>42</sup> Gibbons was careful to insist that city comedies "do not present in any useful sense 'a keen analysis in economic terms' nor may they be rashly cited as evidence of actual conditions" (16). I agree that we should proceed with caution when reading these plays against economic and social realities, but I want to emphasize the degree to which the satirical design of these plays depended to some extent on conjuring experiences and characters recognizable to the audience in their own city lives. This brings me closer to Leinwand's understanding of the interrelation between these elements as found in London and as depicted on its stages. Both informed the other. As Leinwand suggests, "I suspect that we insult the audiences at the open-air theaters when we limit their reception of these plays to identification with heroes and villains. There was a regular and sophisticated theater audience that was capable of judging enacted versions of its own experience – especially when each element of city comedy was drawn in such high relief" (70).

<sup>43</sup> Leinwand suggests that when a gentleman-gallant is the hero of a city comedy, as is the case in both of Middleton's city comedies included in this chapter as well as Massinger's comedy, it is because, unlike the merchant-citizens of the play, "he is not obsessed with his role playing. A character like Witgood (in *A Trick*) is in control of his act, and he has a good time putting it on. He knows that he can return to himself . . . The comic spirit informing city comedy does not despair over a world of endlessly shifting roles that are nothing but roles; it locates a secure self in the gentleman, the sponsor of prevailing ideologies, and it suggests (perhaps only tacitly) that equivalent selves must be found for the merchant-citizen and for women" (91-92). My readings focus instead on the abilities of such characters to understand and adopt a form of rhetorical manipulation without giving in wholesale to its implications. The debtor-protagonists of this chapter, whether gentlemen gallants or merchant-citizens (as with *Greene's Tu Quoque* and *If You Know Not Me*), return to some recognition of the authenticity of affective ties, rather

conclusions, however, these city comedies do not make their protagonists mouthpieces for the nostalgic insistence of a fading order. Far from being innocent of the economically motivated deceptions of the city, these protagonists exemplify a sophisticated understanding of how socio-economic motivations get pursued through the manipulation of affective ties and lip service to these obligations. This understanding enables them to both read their cohabitants effectively and to speak the same language with greater success. This is an important take away from this study of debt plots in city comedies because it provides some insight into the degree to which, even as the genre dramatizes highly exaggerated depictions of the city's commercial ethos, it subtly registers the cultural changes that we can legitimately understand as a response to the new economics. For Middleton and Cooke, audiences needed protagonists who were initiated into the market's infiltration into social relations. Gestures towards conventional morality were not sufficient to render a protagonist sympathetic. A certain economic savvy was needed, and we get this in the debtor-protagonist's ability to both participate in, and occasionally transcend, the rhetorical trick of shifting back and forth between debt's economic and affective obligations.<sup>44</sup>

Heywood's chronicle history and Massinger's country comedy both take different attitudes towards the city comedy tropes they employ. In *If You Know Not Me*, these tropes do not constitute pleasurable, if guilty, play so much as problems to be resolved in the process of

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than the "secure self" with which Leinwand is concerned. Perhaps these can be understood as related phenomena, however. Leinwand seems to suggest as much when he observes that, "Middleton does not reject role playing. He prefers that the playing self be responsible and that it have a social consciousness, a mature awareness of others" (106). Indeed, Leinwand cites Wittgood's and Curtizan's ability to "balance the claims made by an authentic self and a society that can encounter that self only in one of its various roles" (108-9) as the reason for their ultimate triumph.

<sup>44</sup> Gibbons argues that city comedies exhibit "increasingly ambivalent attitude towards the skilful, ruthless materialist who knows how to manipulate capital and the technicalities of the law. . ." (119). The description of the debtor-protagonists I offer above differs from Gibbons' view in that the particular means through which they manipulate economic relations in their favor requires an understanding of how affection gets exploited in these transactions but also of the importance of occasionally prioritizing affective obligations over economic motivations. This sets the protagonists apart from their fellow manipulators, indeed it gives them an edge in the endless cycle of manipulation. For this reason, I suggest that these protagonists elicit more than mere ambivalence.

reconciling city prosperity with nostalgic country values represented by Tawnicote. Heywood's history wants to at once praise and glorify the great merchant-citizens of its London for their prosperity and what it can and has done for the city, but also to remind them of the importance of remembering their obligations to those below them in the social scale, just as the city must remember the countryside. The virtues attending prosperity, thrift on the one hand, hospitality and benefaction on the other, must be reconciled with charity, and owing should always be underwritten by the affective tie of knowing one's creditors and debtors. Heywood's play is both more nostalgic than the city comedies, with its focus on country values and the importance of charity, and more optimistic about city commercial culture. And yet, it comes closer than the city comedies to suggesting the potential tragic implications of its debt plot with Tawnicote's bleak view of hardhearted humanity and nature. Tawnicote's surprisingly misanthropic speech looks ahead to the misanthropy of Timon, another debtor whose tragic trajectory presents an altogether different possibility for the direction of the city's market infused culture.

More than any other comedy in this chapter, Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* deploys city comedy tropes in a tragic-comic fashion.<sup>45</sup> Its usurer is a straightforward villain, and his would-be victims are mostly uncomplicated moral figures whose noble blood stands as evidence of their rightful possession of the status, land, and wealth such city figures threaten to steal from them through a desire for social mobility that is wholly malicious.<sup>46</sup> As such, Massinger's dramatization of the perversion of affective ties is the most conservative of all, but

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<sup>45</sup> O'Callaghan describes Middleton's *A Chaste Maid* as "an example of urban tragicomedy" due to its various miraculous transformations effected by Touchwood Sr. (the young lovers come back to life, Lady Kix is suddenly pregnant), but I find this generic designation unconvincing since we are let in on all of the tricks behind these transformations. [Author] acknowledges that Middleton's interest is likely in parodying the form (170).

<sup>46</sup> Homem has noted that Massinger's characters are often described as "tend[ing] towards a quasi-allegorical neatness of 'complete goodness and thorough villainy', as against the complexities of tragically 'mixed characters'" (214).

even here we find that the many threats Overreach poses the country gentry outside of Nottingham can only be resolved by a debtor-protagonist who is initiated in the rhetorical trick of manipulating affective ties for economic ends. Wellborn manages to do so in a manner that genuinely restores friendships and leads to new alliances between households that strengthen the hold the gentry have on their wealth and status, but it is a trick only a former prodigal well-versed in city ways could effect. For all his idealized nobility and martial prowess, Lovell could not have out-maneuvered Overreach as the one time profligate Wellborn manages to do.

With these comedies, the rhetorical trick of conflating debt's economic and affective obligations proves both a symptom of the predatory avarice and stability-threatening social climbing popularly imagined in early seventeenth century London theaters, and a solution for navigating and managing these forces in a manner that allows for both economic and social stability and responsibility.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Kindness that Kills: Tragic Misreadings of Debt**

In the previous chapter, we saw the occasional hint that the tropes of city comedy described there – unkind households and the systemic manipulation of debt’s economic and affective obligations – carry potentially tragic outcomes. In this chapter, we will see these conventions deployed in tragedy by some of the same authors we have seen examining them in comedic form: Thomas Heywood, Thomas Middleton and William Shakespeare. In Heywood’s domestic tragedy *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603) and Shakespeare’s and Middleton’s tragedy *Timon of Athens* (1607), I find similar concerns around debt’s reorganization of household and familial relations, but here these unnatural relations neither right themselves nor take on a sustainable or palatable form. The household is broken, ties of kinship, friendship and citizenship are severed, and death, misanthropy and revenge are the end results of this social reorganization. These tragedies were written and performed around the same time as Heywood’s *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Bodie Part 2* (1605) and Middleton’s *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (~1605-07), so the various generic possibilities presented by this set of tropes intimately tied to the city’s, and the country’s, changing economics and socialscapes were being dramatized in close proximity to one another. We may well be interested in pursuing the question, then, of what conditions made the difference between these tropes producing tragic rather than comedic outcomes?

Close examination of the two plays that follow suggest that the difference lies in the tragic protagonists’ inability to effectively read the rhetoric of debt and sociability in circulation

in their respective texts. We have seen that our comedic protagonists prove to be good readers of debt and skillful manipulators of its overlapping economic and affective vocabularies. They also know how to sort out and balance debt relations that proceed from economic motivations against those that ultimately have their basis in some authentic affective tie. In city comedies, failures of kindness present opportunities for debtor-protagonists to exercise their wit and rhetorical manipulations but also to draw on the strength of genuine affective relationships. In these two tragedies, our debtor and creditor protagonists fall prey to the rhetorical manipulations surrounding the debt relations in which they are intimately and catastrophically entwined. Ironically, these manipulations are often their own and proceed from their confusion about the nature of the debt relations they enter. In these tragedies, failures of kindness are catastrophic events that demand retribution and sacrifice before alliances can be restored. In Heywood's domestic tragedy *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, women become the scapegoats for the failures of male alliance. The dishonor of failed trust and bad credit are thrust onto their sexual characters and must be transformed through repentance and self-murder, on the one hand, and the gift of chastity restored, on the other. In Shakespeare's and Middleton's tragedy *Timon of Athens*, failures of male alliance proceed from a cosmology of nature in decay in which affection and self-interest cannot be reconciled. The hostile wild, the predations of the Athenian economy, and language itself, particularly the rhetoric of sociability and flattery that disguises these economic predations as friendship, are responsible for the failure of kindness, leaving the cynically unredemptive responses of absolute hate and destruction.

### ***A Woman Killed with Kindness***

Though this domestic tragedy is set in the countryside of Yorkshire, the city comedy milieu of competition, self-interest, prodigality and debt is the backdrop against which the play's



alliances between households and kin fail. Specifically, Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* centers on the problems presented by a prevailing ethos of "strange kindness" in which traditional household virtues – charity and hospitality – are rendered perverse in their deficiency, excess, or misdirection. The perversion of these virtues is a result of the intrusion of market logic and culture into the familial and domestic relationships of the play. In the play's subplot, the characters Sir Francis Acton and Spendall use seemingly charitable acts of economic kindness to imprison and otherwise enslave Sir Charles Mountford, to each respectively an enemy and a stranger ripe for deception. In these instances, this "strange kindness" acts in a manner similar to what we saw Shylock employ with his "merry bond" in *The Merchant of Venice*. In the play's main plot, the amiable country gentleman Frankford purchases companionship by indulging a stranger, Wendoll, in excessive hospitality rather than nurturing the natural alliances his marriage provides between himself and his wife Anne and her brother, Sir Francis Acton. Around these economically-bonded relationships that usurp familial ties, there is an anxiety concerning the strange bedfellows made by commerce. When these strange relations result in economic ruin, perpetual indebtedness, and betrayal, the men afflicted by their enemy-creditors, stranger-creditors, and stranger-debtor-friends attempt to overcome these failures of trust and restore relations with their natural male allies by scapegoating and sacrificing the women who serve as bonds between them.<sup>1</sup> When money and economic debt fail to create sustainable, trustworthy alliances, these men turn back to women, the traditional tokens of exchange and alliance between men. These women, Charles Mountford's sister Susan and Frankford's wife Ann, must transform the dishonor of broken trust and alliance by first being made into whores by their men, and then being redeemed from whoredom respectively through repentance, death, and forced marriage. In

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<sup>1</sup> This tendency in the literature of the period is the subject of Lorna Hutson's book, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

this domestic tragedy, the women above all pay the price for the strange kindness that permeates and perverts the play's male relationships.<sup>2</sup>

In the play's subplot, we can see the flip side of the play's strange kindness – the “estrangement of kind.” When Susan Mountford seeks the aid of an elder cousin after her brother Sir Charles has been imprisoned for debt:

*Susan* . . . What say you, cousin Tydy?  
*Tydy* I say this comes of roisting, swaggering.  
Call me not cousin: each man for himself.  
Some men are born to mirth and some to sorrow.  
I am no cousin unto them that borrow.  
*Susan* O Charity, why art thou fled to heaven,  
And left all things on this earth uneven? (9.32-8)<sup>3</sup>

The lament for the loss of charity is similar to concerns we saw in Heywood's chronicle history, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part 2*. Susan's despair is well warranted as Cousin Tydy's refusal is the last in a litany of similar responses from “kinsmen and allies” to the Mountfords (7.69). An uncle, Old Mountford, explains that Charles “lost my kindred when he fell to need” (9.17). A family friend, Sandy, confesses, “I knew you ere your brother sold his land . . . But now I neither know you nor your suit” (9.22-5). Susan's reminder to a longtime tenant, Master Roder, that “[r]ent-free [Sir Charles] placed you in that wealthy farm/ Of which

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<sup>2</sup> Criticism on *A Woman Killed with Kindness* tends to take its generic identity as a domestic play as a starting point. Laura G. Bromley has read the play against domestic conduct manuals from the period in “Domestic Conduct in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*,” *Studies in English Literature* 26 (1986). Lena Cowen Orlin has taken up the encounter between private domestic space and public, patriarchal ideologies in *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). The play's representations of household management and life in provincial England have been read against actual experience in Wendy Wall's *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Catherine Richardson's “Properties of Domestic Life: The Table in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*,” in *Staged Properties in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 129-52. The play's engagement with credit and debt has not been the primary focus of many critical studies. If discussed, it is understood in relation to domestic management or homosocial bonds, as in Lyn Bennett's “The Homosocial Economics of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 24.2 (2000).

<sup>3</sup> I am drawing from the 2008 Oxford edition of *A Woman Killed with Kindness and Other Domestic Plays*.

you are possessed” produces only his assurance that “[t]hey that have hurled him in will help him out” (9.27-31). What Susan decries as the loss of charity figures here as the failure of social bonds—family, friendship, and patronage. Here we see the estrangement of kin due to self-interest. Throughout the play, failures of kindness are linked discursively and structurally with the problem of debt. Confusion regarding what is due, to whom, and on what relational or moral basis leads to the betrayal and estrangement of social bonds. Kindred behave as strangers; and strangers give or receive the kindness that is denied by or to kin for self-interested ends.

The lack of familial kindness and charity encountered by Susan above is one of many such examples in the Mountford plot of *A Woman Killed*. Sir Charles’s troubles begin with a hawking wager between himself and his friend Sir Francis Acton. When the noblemen disagree over whose hawk wins the wager, the dispute turns into a quarrel between households, with each man’s attachés and servants taking up the dispute.

*Sir Francis*     All they that love Sir Francis follow me.  
*Sir Charles*    All that affect Sir Charles draw on my part.  
*Cranwell*       On this side heaves my hand.  
*Wendoll*        Here goes my heart.  
*They divide themselves [and draw their weapons.] Sir Charles, Cranwell, Falconer, and Huntsman fight against Sir Francis, Wendoll, his Falconer and Huntsman.* (3.38-40)

Though both parties are wounded and complicit in the violence, in the end Sir Charles has killed Sir Francis’ Falconer and Huntsman, and his own men abandon him to his fate: “I came into the field with many friends,/ But see, they all have left me. Only one/ Clings to my sad misfortune, my dear sister” (3. 99-101). Here, as in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Greene’s Tu Quoque*, it is a sibling relationship that defies the otherwise unkind familial relations. His sister Susan’s fears that Sir Francis “will pursue you/ Unto the utmost danger of the law” (3.70-1) are confirmed, and the litigation that follows costs Charles “all the revenues that his father left him”

(5.4-9). Sir Francis' extreme measures against the Mountfords violate the moral injunction offered in the play's prologue: "But gentle thoughts, when they may give the foil,/ Save them that yield where they may spoil" (13-14). The couplet concludes an extended apology for the play's "barren subject" and "bare scene." (4). Requesting a charitable response to the play's meager offerings in terms of a duel or sporting match, the prologue acknowledges the playhouse's own place in an ethos shaped by competition and market relations, and the role of charity in keeping things 'even.'

After these initial troubles, Sir Charles Mountford becomes, essentially, a repentant prodigal type, highly sympathetic in his recourse to stoicism and good husbandry in response to the hardship of the new life he and his devoted sister live on the one piece of land remaining in their possession. Mourning the loss of his inheritance, Charles comforts himself with thoughts of divine patrimony: "I would I were in heaven, to inherit there/ Th' immortal birthright which my saviour keeps/ And by no unthrift can be bought and sold" (5.27-9). Embracing the humbleness of his diminished estate, he strikes a stoic tone: "All things on earth thus change, some up, some down./ Content's a kingdom, and I wear that crown" (7.6-7). In a move similar to one we saw in Cornwallis's paradox, Sir Charles considers the virtuous effects of his debt: "so bent my thoughts to husbandry/ That I protest I scarcely can remember/ What a new fashion is, how silk or satin/ Feels in my hand. Why, pride is grown to us/ A mere, mere stranger" (7.48-52). Enter the city usurer to reintroduce the prodigal to pride.

Charles' plight attracts a *real* "stranger," Shafton, a predatory lender and hard-hearted creditor who plays on the pride that Sir Charles has not quite estranged after all. Shafton pays lip service to Charles's aristocratic entitlement to the gifts attending service and fealty. He salutes the newly impoverished Charles upon his release from prison with "a hand, a hand--at liberty./

Now by the faith I owe, I am glad to see it./ What want you? Wherein may I pleasure you?" (5.21-3). Shafton suggests here that it is he who owes something to Sir Charles, "faith" and whatever assistance he may need. Shafton offers Charles three hundred pounds, obscuring the nature of the loan by dressing what is usury as the gift of good fortune: "Applaud your fortune, and your fair escape/ From all these perils" (5.31-40). Sir Charles does not question Shafton's gift, readily accepting the underlying premise of "the faith" this man owes him, little suspecting Shafton's true intent: "Tis not for love I proffered him this coin,/ But for my gain and pleasure" (5.52-3). Sir Charles declares himself "indebted/ even to the best of my unable power" (5.51-57), not understanding the kind of debt he has taken on or what such indebtedness entails. When Shafton later *shafts* him by calling in the loan and "the use," Sir Charles is surprised by such measures: "An execution, sir, and never tell me/ You put my bond in suit? You deal extremely" (7.32-3). As the sergeant arrests Charles, again, Shafton explains just how extremely he intends to deal with him:

Actions and actions  
 Shall keep thee in perpetual bondage fast.  
 Nay, more, I'll sue thee by a late appeal  
 And call thy former life in question.  
 The keeper is my friend: thou shalt have irons,  
 And usage such as I'll deny to dogs.  
 Away with him! (7.58-64)

Like Overreach or Damppit, Shafton proves a misanthropic villain of a usurer, whose predations go far beyond standard issue self-interested uncles. And yet Shafton's cruelty simply finishes off the process begun by Sir Francis Acton's extreme usage of Sir Charles. Shafton's "[a]ctions and actions" certainly suggests a parallel to the litigious Sir Francis *Acton*. Both operate in an ethos shaped by competition and extreme dealings, and both violate the play's moral injunction to "spare where they may spoil" with their lack of charity.

When the Mountfords' "unkind uncle," "friends ingrate," and "unthankful kinsmen" (10.4, 6) fail to come to the aid of Sir Charles, it is his enemy, Sir Francis, that pays off all his debts. It is a move we have seen before, when Hoard pays off Witt-good's debts at the urging of Curtizan. In this domestic tragedy, however, this act is far from liberating for the former prodigal. That Sir Charles' redemption comes from "he, nor father, nor ally, nor friend,/ More than a stranger, both remote in blood/ And in his heart opposed my enemy" (10.113-15) only fetters him all the more, for he "must now lie bound/ In more strict prison than they stony jail" (10.95). Sir Francis' payment of Charles' debt is an act of hostile charity, a "strange kindness" (10.119) that "like a burden hath surcharged me" (14.63). As with Mauss's description of potlatch in which gift-giving functions as an act of war, here Acton's "strange kindness" is an oppressive act that enslaves the debtor to his creditor-enemy.<sup>4</sup>

Sir Charles chooses to relinquish himself of this heavy burden by adopting "strange kindness" himself. He determines to repay the oppressive debt with "one rich gift" (10.124), his chaste and devoted sister Susan. In doing so Charles attempts to make "strange" the one true affective alliance in the Mountford plot: "Call me not brother, but imagine me/ Some barbarous outlaw or uncivil kern" (14.4-5). When Susan assures Charles she would redeem his debt "with my life or blood," Charles accepts: "I challenge it, and kindred set apart" (14.34-5). Charles asks Susan to pay his debt with her chastity, not "in a brother's name,/ But in a stranger's" (14.50-1). Charles makes a gift of Susan to Sir Francis against her will, and when Sir Francis, moved by her plight, decides to restore her threatened chastity by making her his wife instead of his whore, we hear nothing from Susan to suggest that the transaction is any more to her liking. What we do get is a clearly expressed reconciliation between the long time enemies, Sir Charles and Sir Francis,

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<sup>4</sup> See Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, translated by Ian Cunnison (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967).

who this marriage unites: “Your metamorphosed foe receives your gift. . . / I seal you my dear brother, her my wife” (15.141-6). In the Mountford plot, the failure of kinship and alliance to foster charity in a milieu defined by competition and extreme measures—spoiling where one might spare—institutes an ethos of “strange kindness” in which charity and gift-giving become hostile and selfish acts. Charles’ decision to sacrifice his devoted sister’s honor, to make a whore of her in order to pay his way out of the bad debt relationship he finds himself in with Sir Francis Acton, stands in sharp contrast to the affectionate and cooperative sibling relationships we saw in the city comedies, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Greene’s Tu Quoque*.

Where the tragedy of the Mountford plot is driven by a deficiency of charity between kinsmen and a hostile charity between enemies and strangers, the play’s main plot suffers from John Frankford’s excessive hospitality to a stranger. Days after his marriage to Anne – sister to Sir Francis Acton of the play’s subplot – Frankford welcomes Wendoll, an amiable stranger, into his household to “[b]e my companion” (4.71). Wendoll arrives at the Frankford household to share the tragic news about the quarrel between “Sir Francis, your wife’s brother” (4.38) and Sir Charles, a friend only recently in attendance at Frankford’s wedding. Though Frankford receives this news by asking after his “brother[’s]” safety and expressing his concern for Sir Charles’ “heinous case” (4.53, 59), it is to Wendoll that he directs his kindness: “I am sorry for him. Sir, a word with you:/ I know you, sir, to be a gentleman/ In all things, your possibilities but mean./ Please you to use my table and my purse:/ They are yours” (4.61-4). Considering Frankford’s ties to those involved in the tragic incident, one would expect his concern to touch these men more directly, but instead he is taken by a strange kindness towards this virtual stranger whom he has previously known only by observation:

This Wendoll I have noted, and his carriage  
Hath pleased me much by observation.

I have noted many good deserts in him:  
He's affable and seen in many things,  
Discourses well, a good companion,  
And though of small means, yet a gentleman  
Of a good house, somewhat pressed by want.  
I have preferred him to a second place  
In my opinion and my best regard. (4.26-34)

Having recently married Anne, and joined his household to the Actons' in doing so, Frankford's best regard seems misdirected here, though we might assume that Wendoll is somehow attached to the Acton household since he takes Sir Francis' part in the skirmish. Nonetheless, Frankford's offer to provide Wendell with "[y]our man, your gelding, and your table, all/ At my own charge" (4.70-1) in exchange for his companionship registers as one of the play's strange kindnesses. Wendoll himself is perplexed by Frankford's kindness. Protesting his lack of desert and merit, Wendoll can only acknowledge himself indebted: "But when your last remembrance I forget,/ Heaven at my soul exact that weighty debt" (4.75-6). Later when Wendoll does violate this solemn oath, he returns to his perplexity over the baseless and excessive kindness Frankford has extended him:

This kindness grows of no alliance 'twixt us--  
. . . I never bound him to me by desert.  
Of a mere stranger, a poor gentleman,  
A man by whom in no kind he could gain,  
He hath placed me in the height of all his thoughts,  
Made me companion with the best and chiefest  
In Yorkshire. He cannot eat without me,  
Nor laugh without me. I am to his body  
As necessary as his digestion,  
And equally do make him whole or sick. (6.32-42)

Wendoll's consideration of Frankford's kindness is guilt-ridden but also perplexed and accusatory. Why, on what grounds, would Frankford give him so much, tempting him always to take more, when there was "no alliance 'twixt us"?

Frankford's excessive hospitality to Wendoll is effectively a betrayal of his other kinship



obligations. The play's peacemaker, Cranwell, scolds Frankford for having failed to "have that interest/ In your wife's brother to be more remiss/ In this hard dealing against poor Sir Charles" (11.23-5). And Frankford places his wife Anne in an impossible situation from the beginning. Only days after their wedding, Frankford takes Wendoll into his household with these ceremonious words: "Come, sir, from this present day/ Welcome to me forever." (4.82-3), positioning Frankford as an addendum to his recent marriage. Frankford commands Anne to "[u]se [Wendoll] with all thy loving'st courtesy" (4.78). Her response signals the danger inherent in such a command: "As far as modesty may well extend/ It is my duty to receive thy friend" (4.78-81). Frankford is oblivious to the limitations of courtesy urged by Anne, and to the dangers of thrusting this stranger into the center of his home and marriage.

We begin to see these dangers emerge, for instance, when Frankford is called into town on business. He sends a message to Wendoll through Anne that urges him to occupy his position as head of household in his absence:

. . . He enjoined me  
 To do unto you his most kind commends.  
 Nay, more, he wills you, as you prize his love  
 Or hold in estimation his kind friendship,  
 To make bold in his absence and command  
 Even as himself were present in the house;  
 For you must keep his table, use his servants,  
 And be a present Frankford in his absence. (6.70-77)

Here is the kindness that kills Anne. By commanding Wendoll to "make bold," "command," and "be a present Frankford," he betrays his household and himself by turning over even his most intimate obligations to this stranger. In doing so, Wendoll creates confusion in his household about where and to whom duty, allegiance, and affection should be directed. When Wendoll attempts to seduce Anne, she observes that her husband "esteems you/ Even as his brain, his eyeball, or his heart" (6.112-13). Anne's anatomy of the two men's relationship diminishes the

distinction between them, a collusion made all the more potent by Frankford's instructions to Wendoll, conveyed by Anne, to "be a present Frankford in his absence" (6.77). Indeed the more Anne expresses the ways in which Wendoll is beholden to her husband, the more unclear it is how far her own duty to Wendoll extends: "I am his wife/ That in your power hath left his whole affairs./ It is to me you speak?" (6.121-3). Wendoll's explanation that he loves Frankford as Anne does and that "the augmentation/ Of my sincere affection borne to you/ Doth no whit lessen my regard of him" (6.140-44) further befuddles what has become a complex network of affective debt relations. Anne's eventual infidelity is the direct result of this confusion: "[t]his maze I am in/ I fear will prove the labyrinth of sin" (6.158-9).

Anne's confusion is echoed by the servant Jenkin. As the Frankford-household servant assigned to be Wendoll's man, his position is at times a farcical reflection of Anne's own confused role. Before the seduction scene, Wendoll asks the servant, "Where's your mistress?"

|                |                                                                                                                   |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Jenkin</i>  | Is your worship married?                                                                                          |
| <i>Wendoll</i> | Why dost thou ask?                                                                                                |
| <i>Jenkin</i>  | Because you are my master, and if I have a mistress, I<br>would be glad like a good servant to do my duty to her. |
| <i>Wendoll</i> | I mean where's Mistress Frankford? (6.56-61).                                                                     |

Like the trusty servant Nicholas who demonstrates his loyalty to Frankford by revealing Wendoll's treachery, and the unidentified maid who stays Frankford's hand from killing Wendoll, the comic Jenkin here plays the role of the dutiful servant reminding others of their place and duty. Once Wendoll and Anne's adultery is discovered, Jenkin's position becomes more uncertain. When he encounters Wendoll on the road after Anne's exile, Jenkin expresses his own confused allegiance: "What, my young master that fled in his shirt! . . . You have made our house in a sweet pickle, have you not, think you? What, shall I serve you still or cleave to the old house?" (16.111-14).

Though it is Wendoll who seduces Anne into adultery, leaving the Frankford house “in a sweet pickle,” it is Frankford’s excessive hospitality that generates this confusion of entitlement and allegiance in the first place. Wendoll’s betrayal seems inevitable even to himself. Anne’s protestations of her husband’s kindnesses to him are nothing compared to Wendoll’s own heavy sense of this weighty debt: “O speak no more,/ For more than this I know and have recorded/ Within the red-leaved table of my heart” (6.123-25). Wendoll describes his betrayal in terms of risky financial management, for in speaking his love to Anne, he claims to “give my life into your hand,/ And at one hazard all my earthly means . . . For you I’ll hazard all” (VI.129-39). The language is reminiscent of Bassanio’s plan to chase his unpaid debts to Antonio with more debts in the hopes of winning the prize, and solution, of the richly left Portia. In *The Merchant of Venice* “hazarding all” is a Christian value with dangerous consequences. Its excessive risk and destructive potential show it to be a questionable strategy for debt management. And yet like Bassanio, Wendoll responds to his unpayable affective and economic debts to Frankford by doubling down and hazarding all. If he must live in Wendoll’s debt for all his “earthly means” than he will enjoy all that Frankford has to offer: “My jocund soul is joyful above measure;/ I’ll be profuse in Frankford’s richest treasure” (11.115-16). The materialism of the Frankford plot, in which household goods are prolific and the mistress of the household is described as “a well-made suit” and “a chain of gold” (1.60, 65), renders Anne the greatest of Frankford’s material possessions to be enjoyed by his strangely elevated debtor. Wendoll’s betrayal, then, is a direct response to the excessive hospitality Frankford bestows on him. If excessive indebtedness is an act of war, then revolt should come as no surprise.

As a villain, Wendoll shares several associations with the offenders of city comedy. His offense, as described by himself, is unnatural and unkind in its violation of the most intimate

affective bonds: “Give me a name, you whose infectious tongues/ Are tipped with gall and poison, as you would/ Think on a man that had your father slain,/ Murdered thy children, made your wives base strumpets/ So call me, call me so! Print in my face/ The most stigmatic title of a villain/ For hatching treason to so true a friend” (6.79-85). Though Frankford is blind to Wendoll’s nature – similar to the blindness rampant in the unkind households of city comedy – his trusty servant Nicholas’s intuitions mark him with an appellation common to city usurers and predators: “I do not like this fellow by no means;/ I never see him but my heart still earns./ Zounds! I could fight with him, yet know not why;/ The Devil and he are all one in my eye” (IV.85-88). Furthermore, his plan at the play’s end to escape “the report of [his] ingratitude” by traveling and perfecting his languages until such time that “at my return I may in court be raised” (16.125-34), places Wendoll in the same cast of characters as Shafton, characters associated with social mobility, dissembling, and rhetorical manipulation for economic profit.

As with Susan’s forced whoredom which is transformed by Sir Francis Acton into the honorable state of marriage, Anne’s performance of repentance for adultery through self-starvation transforms her dishonor in a manner that reassembles the community of kin and allies that was destroyed or put aside for the majority of the play. Though Frankford and Anne are reconciled on her deathbed, it is the restoration of the neglected bond between Frankford and Sir Francis Acton that remains: “You are my brother by the nearest way;/ Her kindred hath fallen off, but yours doth stay” (17.102). The play’s conclusion does reinstitute kindness by restoring kinship bonds and alliance between men, but only through the cruel sacrifice of Anne and Susan as scapegoats for the initial failures of these bonds.

The tragedy of this play lies first in the failure of these householders to discern good debt relations from bad ones, to understand what they owe to whom, and to accurately decipher and

balance their affective and economic debts. It also lies in their decisions to bail themselves out of these bad debt relations by transferring their own failed honor onto the women of their households. The ruin of both Mountford's and Frankford's households – the first by loss of patrimony, the second by loss of his wife's fidelity – are the result of each man's decision to enter relationships of trust with strangers. Neither chose to do so for self-interested reasons; both characters are sympathetic and seemingly well-intentioned in their misdirected choices, but they are tragic figures, nonetheless, because they prove to be poor readers of debt.

### ***Timon of Athens***

Shakespeare's and Middleton's *Timon* is the most tragic debtor, and reader of debt, in the texts covered by this dissertation, and his Athens is a dystopic society in which affective bonds have lost all sway.<sup>5</sup> His tragedy is the resulting disorder, akin to that which Panurge warned of in imagining a world without debts. As Athens' richest citizen, Timon is surrounded by flatterers who court him incessantly for gifts and favors. Timon accepts the flattery of these men at face value and responds with a prodigal hospitality without regard for the realities of his coffers or the warnings of his steward. Timon's tragic turn from philanthropist to misanthrope stems from his belief in the "magic of bounty" (1.1.6).<sup>6</sup> Just as Timon believes his supply will equal his desire to bestow, so he believes the relationships this magical bounty underwrites will prove to be what

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<sup>5</sup> Much of the criticism on *Timon of Athens* is focused on its economic content, and the following highlight some of the more influential readings of this sort. Michael Chorost's "Biological Finance in Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*," *ELR* 21 (1991) has shown that the play critiques money-based economies as destructive of both human relationships and nature's reproductive capabilities. Coppelia Kahn's "'Magic of Bounty': *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power," *SQ* 38 (1987), investigates the play's representation of gift-giving and credit finance as the cultural forms constituting Elizabethan and Jacobean patronage. Kahn compelling finds underlying these forms a fantasy of maternal bounty and betrayal. In *Theatre, Finance, and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), Theodore Leinwand urges us away from readings of Timon's waste as prodigality or something like potlatch. For Leinwand, Timon attempts to exempt himself from "the entire economics of indebtedness" (36). Most recently, Amanda Bailey's "*Timon of Athens*, Forms of Payback and the Genre of Debt," *ELR* 41.2 (Spring 2011), has connected the play's engagement with the debt and the penal debt bond with both the play's generic disruptions and the theater's own material means of production.

<sup>6</sup> All quotations and citations come from *The Norton Shakespeare* (1997).

they profess to be. In the Athens of Shakespeare's and Middleton's play, we can find some of the most sophisticated examples of the manipulation of debt's economic and affective obligations. Timon and the many creditors, debtors and would-be debtors who attend him all engage in the rhetorical trick of translating their transactional relations into love and friendship. Only Timon, however, believes that these professions generate friendship (in the same way he believes his bestowals generate wealth).

Unlike the city comedies of the last chapter and Heywood's domestic tragedy, *Timon of Athens* is remarkably devoid of familial and domestic relationships. There are no wives, mothers, daughters or sisters to be found in the play. Though we do not see women transformed from virtuous to vicious here as we do in *A Woman Killed*, the few women present in *Timon's* Athens similarly serve as the signifiers of the play's economic predations. Women appear here in two forms, Amazons (in the play's masque) or whores, and they function only as a means of destruction among men. The primary household of the play is Timon's, and here the only domestic relationships represented are between Timon and his faithful steward, Flavius, and his resident Cynic philosopher, Apemantus. These two servants are the only honest voices in Timon's household, otherwise overrun with flatterers and parasites, and yet Timon affectionately disregards the warnings of each. The "natural" bonds of family are missing altogether in the play, then, and the closest, most authentic bonds of service and trust are not accorded their proper value and credibility.

In place of familial and domestic relationships, the play focuses on various forms of male alliance among the Athenian citizenry: friendship, service, and patronage. Timon enters the play bestowing his "magic of bounty" on various suitors. His first actions onstage are to free a young debtor, "Noble Ventidius" (1.1.101), from prison by paying the sum of his debts at the

outrageous cost of five talents and to bestow a fortune on a servant, Lucilius, to make him equal to the honor of marrying a gentleman's daughter (1.1.96-149). In bestowing these gifts, Timon cites friendship and the bonds of service and sociability as the basis for his generosity: "I am not of that feather to shake off/ My friend when he must need me. I do know him/ A gentleman that well deserves help" (1.1.103-104), and "This gentleman of mine hath served me long./ To build his fortune I will strain a little,/ For 'tis a bond in men" (1.1.146-48). Timon describes his gift-giving and patronage as participation in a network of cooperation and reciprocity among equals: "O, what a precious comfort 'tis to have so many like brothers commanding one another's fortunes!" (1.2.95-98). Even as his economic troubles begin to emerge, Timon comforts himself with the delusion that in his assemblage of flatterers and parasites, he is "wealthy in his friends" (2.2.179). However, the amity and mutuality Timon claims exists among himself and his debtor-friends is belied by the self-interested management of these relationships on the part of both the suitors and Timon.

Timon's household is full of poets and painters seeking patronage; merchants, jewelers and mercers peddling their luxury wares; and citizens and senators in pursuit of favors, high returns on gifts, and (while they're in the neighborhood) a seat at Timon's lavish table. Their praise of Timon's noble parts is inextricably tied to his excessive generosity, often spoken of in terms of high yielding interest:

|             |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| First Lord  | Come, shall we in,<br>And taste Lord Timon's bounty? He outgoes<br>The very heart of kindness.                                                                                                     |
| Second Lord | He pours it out. Plutus the god of gold<br>Is but his steward; no meed but he repays<br>Sevenfold above itself; no gift to him<br>But breeds the giver a return exceeding<br>All use of quittance. |
| First Lord  | The noblest mind he carries<br>That ever governed man.                                                                                                                                             |

Second Lord

Long may he live in fortunes! (1.1.272-281)

The prodigal nature of Timon's hospitality is implied here by those who are its beneficiaries; he "outgoes" kindness and "pours it out," language that suggests a wasteful extravagance. The economics of Timon's bounty is never far from the minds of his suitors, who often describe their gift exchanges with the rich lord in terms of high yielding investments ("repays/ sevenfold") or a kind of inverse usury ("breeds the giver a return"). When these men wish Timon a long life of good fortune, they wish it on themselves since Timon is, in effect, the Athenian economy itself, a bull market or, as we will see, a bubble everyone is happy to bolster with praise as long he continues to "pour out."

That these men are fair weather friends attending to their own interests in their praise and attendance on Timon is evident to all but Timon himself. In the play's opening scene, a poet describes the "rough work" he plans to present Timon, about a man, "of Lord Timon's frame" (1.1.70) singled out by Fortune and attended by all others: "When Fortune in her shift and change of mood/ Spurns down her late beloved, all his dependants,/ Which labored after him to the mountain's top/ Even on their knees and hands, let him fall down/ Not one accompanying his declining foot" (1.1.85-89). The painter agrees that the poet "do[es] well/ to show Lord Timon that mean eyes have seen/ The foot above the head" (93-95), but the warning is one Timon consistently fails to heed.

Though Timon affectionately tolerates the aspersions of his resident Cynic philosopher Apemantus, he does not take seriously the brutal truths he speaks, particularly concerning the nature and motivations of the flattering Athenians who surround his lord. After identifying the jeweler as a "knave" (1.1.185-191), the poet a liar (217-223), the merchant a worshipper of "traffic" (239), and all Athenians dishonest (195-197), Apemantus scorns the suitors' flattery of



Timon wondering “[t]hat there should be small love ‘mongst these sweet knaves,/ And all this courtesy!” (1.1.250-52). Apemantus describes the forms of sociability around him as hostile and bestial acts clothed in the artifice of courtesy. As Timon feasts his suitors, Apemantus observes the violence in their consumption of his bounty:

O you gods, what a number of men eats Timon, and he sees ‘em not! It grieves me to see so many dip their meat in one man’s blood; . . . I wonder men dare trust themselves with men. . . . The fellow that sits next him, now parts bread with him, pledges the breath of him in a divided draught, is the readiest man to kill him.  
(1.2.38-47)

The predatory language here reminds us of Middleton’s contributions to the play. As in *A Trick to Catch the Old One* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, predatory and bestial language is used here to describe the way social bonds and the rituals that nurture them (hospitality, gift-giving, courtesy, expressions of love, etc.) are perverted by economic motivations. As we will see, this Middletonian language of predation and bestiality points to a broader cosmology of decay in *Timon* that is intimately tied to the tragedy’s representation of its economic relations.

Flavius too, Timon’s trusty and anxious steward, tries to no avail to warn his master of his approaching financial ruin:

He commands us to provide and give great gifts,  
And all out of an empty coffer;  
Nor will he know his purse, or yield me this:  
To show him what a beggar his heart is,  
Being of no power to make his wishes good.  
His promises fly so beyond his state  
That what he speaks is all in debt, he owes  
For every word. He is so kind that he now  
Pays interest for’t. (1.2.188-95)

Here we get an account of Timon’s bounty from the guy who keeps the books. What is rhetorically framed by Timon as gift-giving amounts on paper to debt, bonds and interest. Flavius depicts his master’s tragic flaw as a conflict between affection and the account book.

Timon gives from his heart without knowing what a beggar it is. He promises kindness, but unbeknownst to him, “what he speaks is all debt” and he pays interest for every word. This description of Timon differs significantly from those knowing debtor-protagonists we saw in the last chapter who intentionally and skillfully manipulate the overlap between debt’s economic and affective obligations to achieve their ends. What Flavius describes is Timon’s inability, or refusal, to see that the affective gifts he and his suitors bespeak are all economic debts. The debtor-protagonists of city comedy are able to navigate the familial, domestic, and social relations made perverse by their economic transactional nature in such a way that they manage to achieve both their economic and affective goals; even as they pull themselves out of their credit crises by outmaneuvering wily usurers, they achieve some kind of authentic affectionate relationship: marriage or successful cooperation with a friend or sibling. Timon, however, is unable to sort out and disentangle the economic from the affective. He does not see, as Flavius does, that his prodigal hospitality and the suitors’ predatory consumption, transforms friends to enemies: “Happier is he that has no friend to feed/ Than such that do e’en enemies exceed./ I bleed inwardly for my lord” (1.2.197-99).<sup>7</sup>

For all Timon’s seeming naivety as a reader of debt, he is complicit in the contest of interests that perverts his supposed friendships. As Apemantus observes, “He that loves to be flattered is worthy o’th’ flatterer” (1.1.226-227). The excess and expense of Timon’s gift-giving denies the receivers opportunity for reciprocation and equality. When Timon pays off Ventidius’ debts freeing him from prison, his messenger observes that with this kindness, “Your lordship ever binds him” (1.1.106). Later, when Ventidius attempts to repay Timon in full, he finds that

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<sup>7</sup> When Timon’s creditors begin to swarm, Flavius reminds Timon of his many warnings along these lines: “‘Heavens,’ have I said, ‘the bounty of this lord!/ How many prodigal bits have slaves and peasants/ This night englutted! Who is not Timon’s?/ What heart, head, sword, force, means, but is Lord Timon’s?/ Great Timon, noble, worthy, royal Timon!/ Ah, when the means are gone that buy this praise,/ The breath is gone whereof this praise is made./ Feast won, fast lost; one cloud of winter show’rs,/ These flies are couched” (2.2.159-167).

Timon will not accept repayment, leaving the freed debtor, debtor still to Timon's generosity. Similarly, when Timon raises Lucilius' estate to make him a worthy husband to the Old Athenian's daughter, the servant describes his perpetual indebtedness: "Never may/ That state or fortune fall into my keeping/ Which is not owed to you" (1.1.193-95). As with Frankford's excessive hospitality, Timon's bounty is a kind of potlatch, and it places him precariously atop Athens' social and power hierarchy. The equality implied by Timon's image of "like brothers commanding one another's fortunes" does not appear to be what he actually desires – that is, until he finds himself in financial crisis. Timon's hospitality is instead debt bondage. While Timon *is* more interested in the affective profits of his debt relations than actual repayment, just as he claims, it is not the friendship of equals he desires. Rather, Timon revels in the flattery of his debtors or would-be debtors, a currency unto itself which reveals the bankruptcy and artifice of friendship and male alliance in the play.

Timon's love of flattery is linked to his stated preference for artifice above "the natural man." When the painter presents Timon with a painting, Timon praises "these penciled figures" for being "[e]ven such as they give out" as opposed to "the natural man" who "since dishonor traffics with man's nature,/ . . . is but outside" (1.1.160-164). Timon's observation here about the disconnect between man's intention or motivation and his outside *should* make him an astute reader of the flatterers who surround him, but as Apemantus points out, Timon forgets that man's creations, the very artifice Timon values for being "even such as [it] give[s] out," are an extension of man's superficial deceptions.

|           |                                                                                                 |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TIMON     | How likest thou this picture, Apemantus?                                                        |
| APEMANTUS | The best for the innocence.                                                                     |
| TIMON     | Wrought he not well that painted it?                                                            |
| APEMANTUS | He wrought better that made the painter, and yet he's but a filthy piece of work. (1.1.198-202) |

While Timon thinks art an improvement on man's corrupt nature, Apemantus reverses Timon's valuation, insisting that art exceeds man's corruption since it proceeds wholly from man. If man was created by god and is yet "a filthy piece of work," what must his own creations and representations be?

As his name implies, Apemantus is closely associated with the natural world in the play. In addition to his association with primates, he is repeatedly called a dog by the characters of the play, both as an expression of contempt for his anti-social manners and as a reference to his philosophy as a Cynic.<sup>8</sup> The philosopher's nature as Ape-Man grants him a special contempt for that artifice by which civil society distinguishes itself from the natural world. This contempt is well-exemplified as the scene continues:

|           |                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TIMON     | How does thou like this jewel, Apemantus?                                                                                         |
| APEMANTUS | Not so well as plain dealing, which will not cost a man a doit.                                                                   |
| TIMON     | What does thou think 'tis worth?                                                                                                  |
| APEMANTUS | Not worth my thinking. How now poet?                                                                                              |
| POET      | How now, philosopher?                                                                                                             |
| APEMANTUS | Thou liest.                                                                                                                       |
| POET      | Art not one?                                                                                                                      |
| APEMANTUS | Yes.                                                                                                                              |
| POET      | Then I lie not.                                                                                                                   |
| APEMANTUS | Art not a poet?                                                                                                                   |
| POET      | Yes.                                                                                                                              |
| APEMANTUS | Then thou liest. Look in thy last work, where thou hast feigned him a worthy fellow.                                              |
| POET      | That's not feigned, he is so.                                                                                                     |
| APEMANTUS | Yes, he is worthy of thee, and to pay thee for thy labour. He that loves to be flattered is worthy o'th' flatterer. (1.1.211-227) |

Apemantus's social critiques all have to do with forms of artifice here: the merchant's crafted jewel, its market value, the fictions of the poet, and above all the rhetorical manipulations of Timon's flatterers. Apemantus counterpoises these to "plain dealing," a way of being he exemplifies through a kind of brute honesty (an expression that takes on its full significance in

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<sup>8</sup> Cynic derives from the Greek word for dog, Kyne.

this context). For Apemantus, honesty is perhaps the only virtue, and the one which he constantly rates the Athenians for lacking.

But Timon embraces his suitors' flattery and courtesies as he does the painter's "penciled figures" – as "even such as they give out." He too engages in the language of courtesy and sociability as a civilized construct that seemingly raises the level of his social interactions above the "dishonor" that "traffics with man's nature." Timon's willful faith in these professions despite his stated awareness of man's deceptive nature is an extension of his willful ignorance of his personal finances. Theodore Leinwand has described the latter as a desire to "[release] himself from economics altogether," "to exempt himself via the 'magic of bounty.'" <sup>9</sup> Timon's willful faith in the rhetorical manipulations that disguise the nature of his social transactions also stem from a desire to distinguish himself and Athenian society at large from the Hobbesian wild that surrounds them.

The natural landscape of *Timon* is neither the green space of the comedies, nor the redemptive mirror of the tragedies. It is a hostile wild without the city walls that manifests itself within the city as the cruelly self-interested transactional social relations of Athenian society. The harsh natural world of *Timon* can be attributed to a cosmology of decay that is signaled in the play's opening lines:

|         |                                              |
|---------|----------------------------------------------|
| POET    | Good day, sir.                               |
| PAINTER | I am glad you're well.                       |
| POET    | I have not see you long. How goes the world? |
| PAINTER | It wears, sir, as it grows.                  |
| POET    | Ay, that's well known. (1.1.1-3)             |

This cosmology held nature to be in an irreversible trajectory of decline and thus ran contrary to the traditional Christianized Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology which viewed nature as rational,

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<sup>9</sup> Leinwand, 34-35.

ordered, and a model for social organization, morality, and human law.<sup>10</sup> As a discourse, decay theory carried the potential to subvert the ideologically dominant discourse of natural law as an idealized and artificial construct. The importance of social bonds, such as the friendship and service Timon and his parasites insist upon in their transactional relations, was upheld by the principles of natural law, namely reciprocity and hierarchy, the idea being that relations and alliances among men correspond to a natural order. Right reason and civil society require the maintenance and nurturing of these bonds. In a cosmos tending toward decay, such as that of *Timon*, the ties represented by these bonds unravel. As John Donne expresses it, in a cosmos of decay, “Prince, subject, father, son, are things forgot,/ For every man alone thinks he hath got/ To be a phoenix.”<sup>11</sup>

Timon values the artifice of flattery and empty courtesy perhaps because it alone appears to distinguish civil society from the harsh wilderness outside the city walls. This language of sociability – which is the rhetorical imprint of the culture of credit in early modern England – functions in the economy of *Timon*’s Athens as the central figure of human artifice. It serves as a rhetorical veil to the economic impulse that, in its predatory nature, is an extension of the decaying, corrupted natural world of the play. However, just as Apemantus sees the work of art to be more corrupted than its “filthy” artist, so he finds in the veil of empty courtesy more evidence of decay than in the naked motivations they disguise: “That there should be small love

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<sup>10</sup> When *Timon* was written (somewhere between 1605 and 1608), decay theory was still a few years away from finding its most famous English expressions, such as John Donne’s *The First Anniversary* (1611) and Godfrey Goodman’s *The Fall of Man, or the Corruption of Nature* (1616), but traces of the discourse were pervasive. Translations of works by Lucretius, Plutarch and Pliny, for instance, and Neo-Latin poetry such as Sir John Davies’ *Nosce Teipsum* (1599). Most critics find the cosmologies within Shakespeare’s canon to stay close to the traditional model, (think here for instance of Ulysses’s degree speech in *Troilus and Cressida* which is an exemplary expression of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic model), but critics have also found in *Troilus and Cressida* and *King Lear* traces of decay theory in direct contention with the more orthodox discourse. Ultimately, *Timon of Athens* presents a more cynical view of nature and human nature than either of these plays, so it is not surprising to find a cosmology of decay here.

<sup>11</sup> Donne, *An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary*, *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), lines 215-17.

‘mongst these sweet knaves,/ And all this courtesy! The strain of man’s bred out/ Into baboon and monkey” (1.1.250-52). For Apemantus, and later for the post-fall Timon, the honesty of nature’s harshness is preferable to the honey-tongued flattery of Timon’s household.

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The run on Timon begins when one clever and fiscally cautious Senator uncovers the precarious and illusory nature of Timon’s magic bounty:

And late five thousand. To Varro and to Isidore
He owes nine thousand, besides my former sum,
Which makes it five-and-twenty. Still in motion
Of raging waste! It cannot hold, it will not.
If I want gold, steal but a beggar’s dog
And give it Timon, why, the dog coins gold.
If I would sell my horse and buy twenty more
Better than he, why, give my horse to Timon—
Ask nothing, give it him—it foals me straight,
And able horses. . . . It cannot hold. . .

Get on your cloak and haste you to Lord Timon.
Importune him or my moneys. (2.1.1-12, 15-16)

What Timon insists is a network of “like brothers” and what his parasites blindly accept as the “magic of bounty,” proves to be little more than prodigality supported by an immense debt load underwritten by various creditors who all share the assumption that Timon is too big to fail. But when this Senator considers that Timon’s widespread borrowing is eclipsed only by his excessive gift-giving which enacts a strange reversal of usury, he sees the writing on the wall: “It cannot hold, it will not.” Aligning Timon’s hospitality with usury – that most unnatural of economic forms – points to its self-interested and destructive nature, further emphasizing the artificial nature of the friendship both Timon and his parasites insist defines the debt relations between them.

The true nature of these economic relationships is revealed as soon as the bubble that was Timon's perceived unlimited prosperity and bounty bursts. The flattery of Timon's suitors gives way to excuses and accusations, and ingratitude proves the primary symptom of the bankruptcy of social bonds in Athens. Once Timon comes to terms with his lack of funds, he insists that these wants are "blessings, for by these/ Shall I try friends" (2.2.177-178). Flavius, however, knows that Timon will find the love of his "friends" all dried up: "Ah, when the means are gone that buy this praise,/ The breath is gone whereof this praise is made./ Feast won, fast lost; one cloud of winter show'rs,/ These flies are couched" (2.2.164-167). Flavius has already sought help from the Athenian Senators who Timon is certain will gladly repay him for all he's done for "the state's best health" (2.2.191). As Flavius warned, their responses are short of the breath that once supported their expressions of love: "Do what they would, are sorry, you are honourable,/ But yet they could have wished – they know not – / Something hath been amiss – a noble nature/ May catch a wrench – would all were well – 'tis pity" (2.2.200-203). Language itself, so tied as it has been to flattery and false expressions of amity, seems to fall apart in the failure of Timon's magic bounty.

Timon sends messengers to others: Lord Lucullus and Lord Lucius whom Timon accounts friends, Ventidius the erstwhile debtor whom he freed in his time of need. All three men find some excuse to deny Timon assistance and a fourth, Sempronius, claims to deny him for the offense of having been Timon's last recourse despite being "the first man/ That e'er received gift from him" (3.3.16-17). A "stranger" in the city observing Lucius's denial of Timon's desperate wants sums up the failure of kindness and gratitude exemplified in Timon's fall:

Why, this is the world's soul, and just of the same piece
Is every flatterer's spirit. Who can call him his friend

That dips in the same dish? For, in my knowing,
 Timon has been this lord's father
 And kept his credit with his purse,
 Supported his estate; nay, Timon's money
 Has paid his men their wages. He ne'er drinks,
 But Timon's silver treads upon his lip;
 And yet – O see the monstrousness of man
 When he looks out in an ungrateful shape! –
 He does deny him, in respect of his,
 What charitable men afford to beggars. (3.2.58-68)

Timon's fall, and the ingratitude that precipitates it, is described here as the betrayal of a father, perhaps the period's most common signifier of social and cosmic decay. The perversion and bankruptcy of affective bonds we have seen across the previous and present chapter is complete, total, and presumably, irreversible in *Timon*.

The predatory behavior we have seen in Timon's household through Apemantus' commentary comes to a climax when Timon finally leaves his house where he has remained hidden to avoid arrest. His creditors' messengers descend on him like a pack of dogs, and Timon's earlier conflation of his heart and coffers takes on an eerily literal and violent cast:

<i>Titus' Servant</i>	My lord, here is my bill
<i>Lucius' Servant</i>	Here's mine.
<i>Hortensius' Servant</i>	And mine, my lord.
<i>Varro's First and Second Servant</i>	And ours, my lord.
<i>Philotus' Servant</i>	All our bills.
<i>Timon</i>	Knock me down with 'em, cleave me to the girdle.
<i>Lucius' Servant</i>	Alas, my lord.
<i>Timon</i>	Cut my heart in sums.
<i>Titus' Servant</i>	Mine fifty talents.
<i>Timon</i>	Tell out my blood.
<i>Lucius' Servant</i>	Five thousand crowns, my lord.
<i>Timon</i>	Five thousand drops pays that. What yours? And yours?
<i>Varro's First Servant</i>	My lord –
<i>Varro's Second Servant</i>	My lord –
<i>Timon</i>	Tear me, take me, and the gods fall upon you. (3.4.83-96)

The scene invokes folkloric accounts common to early modern anti-usury tracts of cruel usurers who took their debtors' bodies, in part or whole, to pay for debts in lieu of money that was not

forthcoming. As we have seen in previous chapters, for an early modern English audience, these accounts would have carried strong associations with the contemporary practice of imprisoning debtors' bodies for their unpaid debts. Though we have seen many of our textual debtors end up in debtors' prison, Timon escapes his creditors and the city in a rage, taking refuge in the harsh and naked wilderness that best suits the view of human nature and the world his fall has revealed.

The play's participation in discourses of decay theory finds full expression once Timon, the philanthropist turned misanthrope flees the city. The speech that opens Act 4, scene 1 participates in a tradition of anatomies of the world decayed and disordered due to the lack of some essential *sine qua non*. The speech rivals Ulysses' in *Troilus and Cressida* which imagines a world without degree and John Donne's "An Anatomy of the World, First Anniversary" which describes society in a state of discord due to the death of Elizabeth Drury. In Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part 2*, we saw something approaching Timon's vision of decay in Tawnicote's description of a world devoid of charity, and in "Panurge's Praise of Debts," Rabelais' wise fool imagines a cosmos without debts in complete disarray. The decayed world Timon describes and, furthermore, wishes on his fellow Athenians stems from the failure of friendship. I quote at length here to provide a full sense of the ramifications Timon imagines proceeding from the failure of kindness and trust he has just experienced:

Let me look back upon thee. O thou wall
That girdles in those wolves, dive in the earth,
And fence not Athens! Matrons, turn incontinent!
Obedience fail in children! Slaves and fools,
Pluck the grave wrinkled senate from the bench
And minister in their steads! To general filths
Convert o'th' instant, green virginity!
Do't in your parents' eyes. Bankrupts, hold fast!
Rather than render back, out with your knives,
And cut your trusters' throats. Bound servants, steal!
Large-handed robbers your grave masters are,
And pill by law. Maid, to thy master's bed!

Thy mistress is o'th' brothel. Son of sixteen,
 Pluck the lined crutch from thy old limping sire;
 With it beat out his brains! Piety and fear,
 Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,
 Domestic awe, night rest, and neighbourhood,
 Instruction, manners, mysteries, and trades,
 Degrees, observances, customs, and laws,
 Decline to your confounding contraries,
 And let confusion live! Plagues incident to men,
 Your potent and infectious fevers heap
 On Athens, ripe for stroke! Thou cold sciatica,
 Cripple our senators, that their limbs may halt
 As lamely as their manners! Lust and liberty,
 Creep in the minds and marrows of our youth,
 That 'gainst the stream of virtue they may strive
 And drown themselves in riot! Itches, blains,
 Sow all th' Athenian bosoms, and their crop
 Be general leprosy! Breath infect breath,
 That their society, as their friendship, may
 Be merely poison! (4.1.1-32)

Like Apemantus, Timon now sees Athens as a predatory wild. When he looks at the city walls from the outside, he sees them as keeping the wolves in rather than without. Timon commands the city's inhabitants to defy their affective obligations, just as his "friends" have done. The result is a society with no virtue, coherence or order. Matrons and maids are unchaste, children disobey their parents, debtors slit their creditors' throats, sons beat their elderly fathers. All virtues cease, all social bonds fall to contraries, and confusion reigns. Timon curses Athens to disease, lust, and riot in the hope of speeding the destruction and decline he imagines already in motion due to the bankruptcy of friendship. Timon's vision of the world is now in line with that of Apemantus. Far from valuing artifice as he once did, Timon now disburdens himself of all artifice associated with civil society, including clothing. He retreats to the woods where he now expects to find "[t]h' unkindest beast more kinder than mankind" (4.1.36). Timon's misanthropy is the endpoint of the estrangement of kind we have seen across these two chapters.

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The failure of kindness that results in Timon's fall is symptomatic of Athens' predatory economic culture. Contract and the rigor of law trump gratitude and mercy both for Timon and for Alcibiades, an Athenian captain home from the wars abroad. One of the captain's men, a "friend" (perhaps the play's only genuine use of the word), has run afoul of the law for killing a citizen in a dispute touching his reputation (3.6.11-20). Alcibiades pleads with the Athenian senators to spare his friend's life, offering several well-reasoned defenses before turning to the debt of gratitude the senators and Athens owe both the soldier in question and Alcibiades for their service on behalf of the state:

My lords, if not for any parts in him –  
Though his right arm might purchase his own time  
And be in debt to none – yet more to move you,  
Take my deserts to his and join 'em both.  
And for I know  
Your reverend ages love security,  
I'll pawn my victories, all my honour to you  
Upon his good returns.  
If by this crime he owes the law his life,  
Why let the war receive't in valiant gore,  
For law is strict, and war is nothing more. (3.6.73-84)

If nothing else, Alcibiades insists, his friend's service has earned him an honorable death on the battlefield. Appealing to the senators' market ethos, Alcibiades offers his many military victories as "security" against his friend's default on their trust. But the senators are unmoved by Alcibiades' claims on their gratitude and mercy. These affective debts are not weighed in the balance against the strict letter of the law, which reads like the penalty of a debt bond: "We are for law; he dies . . . Friend or brother,/ He forfeits his own blood that spills another" (3.6.85-87). There is an interesting echo here of Shylock's insistence on the letter of the law in *Merchant's* trial scene. The parallel stands out in particular since Alcibiades identifies the senators as

usurers. The suggestion in both cases is that usurers and hardhearted creditors seeking interest relied on the letter of the law to justify their severity. Both cases suggest the importance of balancing contractual and legal obligations with affective debts – the mercy Christians owe their neighbors, the equity law should offer for the circumstances of individual cases, long standing service rendered on behalf of the state’s well-being.

Alcibiades urges the senators to “know me,” “call me to your remembrances” (89-90). Like Timon, the presumably honored captain – responsible for so many Athenian victories, for the security of the city – is amazed to learn how little credit Athenian praise and honor buy him when giving turns to need: “I cannot think but your age has forgot me./ It could not else be I should prove so base/ To sue and be denied such common grace./ My wounds ache at you” (3.6.91-94). In exchange for their “fair service” and for slaying “in fight many of [the senators’] enemies” (3.6.62-63), the soldiers find neither leniency nor forgiveness from the senators. Alcibiades is banished from the city and his friend sentenced to immediate execution. Like Timon, Alcibiades’ response is rage against Athens:

I’m worse than mad. I have kept back their foes  
While they have told their money and let out  
Their coin upon large interest – I myself,  
Rich only in large hurts. All those for this?  
Is this the basalm that the usuring senate  
Pours into captains’ wounds? Banishment!  
It comes not ill; I hate not to be banished.  
It is cause worthy my spleen and fury,  
That I may strike at Athens. (3.6.102-112)

In particular, Alcibiades positions the city’s culture of usury, perpetuated by the senators, in opposition to the economy of honor found on the battlefield. Like Timon’s hospitality, Alcibiades’ military service has supported and enabled the economic prosperity and security of Athens. In both cases, the reciprocity these men assumed in their affective relationship with the

city – generosity and amity on the part of Timon, loyalty and service on the part of Alcibiades – proves to be empty rhetoric. Though the economic security of Athens depended on both, and though the rhetoric of praise and honor was used as a form of exchange for the services provided by both, when these two honored citizens seek reciprocity or a return on their affective investment, the precedence of the market economy above affective bonds becomes clear. Both are found in violation of legal contracts with no hope of forgiveness, relief, or mercy for former credit earned. Just as Timon's excessive generosity, out of place in the transactional culture of Athens, turns to its extreme corollary, an irreversible, ever-intensifying misanthropy, so Alcibiades turns his martial prowess from service to Athens, to its destruction. In his banishment, Alcibiades too turns to the woods where the harsh and honest wild is more in keeping with his martial nature.

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Timon finds no relief in the wild surrounding Athens for it becomes clear that the wall between the city and the wilderness is no true divide or barrier, but rather a highly permeable and artificial boundary. Timon attempts to free himself of men and artifice by living in a cave, naked, digging the earth in search of roots for his bare sustenance. Instead, Timon finds gold – the natural, naked basis for the convoluted, deceptive network of debt and credit Timon has just escaped in Athens. The irony is important to the play's anatomy of the relationship between the decaying social order of Athens and the decaying natural world. If in its brutal honesty and nakedness the wilderness offers a somewhat kindlier setting than what Timon found in Athens' veil of false friendship and flattery, it nonetheless offers no actual relief or alternative to the hostile, competitive, and ultimately destructive nature of social and economic relations in the city. The two are intimately entwined, as Apemantus has understood from the beginning; Athens

just dresses the wolf in lamb's clothing, a move Apemantus, Timon the misanthrope, and the play all agree to be the most predatory and beastly of all. Possessed of wealth once again, Timon determines that this time he will use it in accordance with its true nature: "Come damned earth,/ Thou common whore of mankind, that puts odds/ Among the rout of nations; I will make thee/ Do thy right nature" (4.3.42-45). As the various wolves of Athens cross the permeable boundary of the walls to seek out Timon, he uses this gold to hasten the destruction of the Athenians.

The latter half of the play dramatizes a series of encounters between Timon the misanthrope and many of the same suitors who once waited on his favors in his household in the city. These encounters provide a contrasting parallel to the first half of the play in which Timon the philanthrope navigated these self-interested exchanges through the rhetoric of sociability. In a sense, the second half of the play redramatizes these exchanges exposing intentions and the true nature of human interaction through Timon's newfound "plain dealing."

The first Athenian to encounter Timon in the wild is Alcibiades, in many ways Timon's counterpart in the betrayal and ingratitude he has experienced at the hands of the Athenian senators. The men were friends in Athens, and there is no indication that Alcibiades was in any way complicit in Timon's fall. However, Timon's misanthropy is absolute. He takes no comfort in Alcibiades' genuine expressions of friendship and gestures of assistance. His only interest in the captain is in his stated resolve to destroy Athens, for which purpose Timon gives him gold and encourages him to be merciless: "Let not thy sword skip one./ Pity not honoured age for his white beard;/ He is a usurer" (4.3.110-112). Timon encourages him to kill the matrons, maids, and babes with equal indifference, and once he has killed them all, to kill himself.

Alcibiades is accompanied by two whores, Phrynia and Timandra, the only female characters to appear in the play besides the Amazons who dance a masque during a feast at

Timon's house in Athens. For Timon these women may as well be Amazons, for in them he sees more destructive potential than in the warfare Alcibiades intends against Athens: "This fell whore of thine/ Hath in her more destruction than thy sword,/ For all her cherubin look" (4.3.61-63). Timon is particularly interested in what these whores might do to hasten the destruction of men because they, like his former Athenian flatterers, destroy with artifice, with "cherubin look," a far more predatory method than Alcibiades' open warfare. These whores Timon also gives gold, encouraging them to revel in their profession: "Be whores still" and "Plague all,/ That your activity may defeat and quell/ The source of all erection. There's more gold./ Do you damn others, and let this damn you;/ And ditches grave you all!" (4.3.139, 161-165). Despite Timon's harsh and hostile salutations, the whores respond just as Timon's flatterers in Athens once did, with praise for his generosity: "More counsel with more money, bounteous Timon" (4.3.166). Alcibiades, however, shows himself pragmatic but wary of Timon's excessive misanthropy: "I'll take the gold thou giv'st me,/ Not all thy counsel" (129-130).

Timon's misanthropy proves to be as immoderate and blind as his former generosity. His failure to recognize Alcibiades as a natural ally against the cruelty of Athens points to the wrongheadedness of his indiscriminate hatred and distrust of men: "Who dare, who dares/ In purity of manhood stand upright/ And say, 'This man's a flatterer'? If one be,/ So are they all, for every grece of fortune/ Is smoothed by that below" (4.3.13-17). Timon's misanthropy does not recognize that even in the decaying world of this play there are authentic affective bonds that are just as they profess to be, even where they overlap with economic relationships. Just as he did during his prosperity, Timon has little regard for the loyalty of his servants. After his fall, shared by these men who more than any others depended on his well being for their own, Timon's household servants disband with expressions of love and concern for their former master rather

than their own sudden loss of both home and livelihood: “Yet do our hearts wear Timon’s livery” (4.2.17) and “Wherever we shall meet, for Timon’s sake/ Let’s yet be fellows” (4.2.24-25).

Fellowship and love prevail over self-interest here, both in the response of these loyal servants to their sudden shared loss and in their interpretation of Timon’s prodigal hospitality. Flavius, the steward who tried to warn Timon about the consequences of his bounty, insists that it was truly born of the love that Timon’s rhetoric of sociability professed: “Poor honest lord, brought low by his own heart/ Undone by goodness! Strange unusual blood/ When man’s worst sin is he does too much good!/ Who then dares to be half so kind again?/ For bounty, that makes gods, does still mar men” (4.2.37-41). In this belief, Flavius seeks his former master in the wild in order to serve him still.

Before this encounter, however, Timon is met with his other honest servant, Apemantus the Cynic philosopher. Like Alcibiades, Apemantus is a natural ally to Timon the misanthrope, for the two men now share a worldview and an affinity for the “plain dealing” of the wild. However, in their shared brute honesty, the play demonstrates the natural Hobbesian state of men’s relations with one another. The two men meet as enemies. Apemantus seeks out Timon because “Men report/ Thou dost affect my manners, and dost use them” (4.3.198-199). The philosopher does not believe Timon is truly changed but rather that his misanthropy “[t]is in thee a nature but infected” (202). He accuses Timon of simply replacing one form of artifice with another. Apemantus encourages Timon to return to the city and regain his fortunes by practicing the artifice he knows too well rather than “assume my likeness” (218): “shame not these woods/ By putting on the cunning of a carper./ Be thou a flatterer now, and seek to thrive/By that which has undone thee. Hinge thy knee,/ And let his very breath whom thou’lt observe/Blow off they cap. Praise his most vicious strain,/ And call it excellent” (208-214). Flattery, Apemantus

assumes, must still be the end Timon seeks, and he mocks Timon for seeking it in the wild among “the creatures/ Whose naked natures live in all the spite/ Of wreakful heaven, whose bare unhoused trunks/ To the conflicting elements exposed/ Answer mere nature” (227-231).

Apemantus’ own identification with this wild points to the pride he takes in assuming both himself and nature impervious to and free of man’s self-interested artifice. Apemantus sees only self-interest in Timon’s hate; the only real transformation, he suggests, is in Timon’s fortunes, from the highest to the lowest. From this point of view, Timon’s misanthropy is little more than a temper tantrum that demands what he has lost.

But Timon holds a mirror up to Apemantus and shows him how little moral or philosophical authority his natural state can claim. If Apemantus has always been free from man’s artifice, it is simply because he was “bred a dog” (4.3.251), born so low as to never know man’s courtesies and flatteries. What reason does Apemantus have then to hate men, never having had their love in the first place? The two misanthropes dispute who has the better claim to their shared hatred of mankind, the man born to suffering or the man thrown into it after having known only praise and pleasure. Timon insists Apemantus’ misanthropy is merely an accident of his birth: “If thou hadst not been born the worst of men/ Thou hadst been a knave and a flatterer” (4.3.274-276). Timon reminds Apemantus too that the difference between the world of men and that of beasts is only a matter of degree not kind. When Apemantus claims he would give the world to “the beast, to be rid of the men” (4.3.320), Timon insists he would not thereby escape the predations and power struggles of men:

A beastly ambition, which the gods grant thee t’attain to. If thou wert the lion, the fox would beguile thee. If thou wert the lamb, the fox would eat thee. If thou wert the fox, the lion would suspect thee when peradventure thou wert accused by the ass. If thou wert the ass, thy dullness would torment thee, and still thou lived’st but as a breakfast to the wolf. If thou wert the world, thy greediness would afflict thee, and oft thou shouldst hazard thy life for thy dinner. Wert thou the unicorn,

pride and wrath would confound thee, and make thine own self the conquest of thy fury. Wert thou a bear, thou wouldst be killed by the horse. Wert thou a horse, thou wouldst be seized by the leopard. Wert thou a leopard, thou wert german to the lion, and the spots of thy kindred were jurors on thy life; all thy safety were remotion, and thy defence absence. What beast couldst thou be that were not subject to a beast? And what a beast art thou already, that seest not thy loss in transformation! (4.3.324-340)

Timon's description of "the commonwealth of Athens" as a "forest of beasts" is a political allegory, and a pleased Apemantus recognizes it as such: "If thou couldst please me with speaking to me, thou mightst have hit upon it here" (341-42). With this animal fable, Timon and Apemantus find common ground before parting ways in a flurry of insults and aspersions. With this parting, Timon states his intention to "presently prepare [his] grave" (4.3.370) but only after turning the gold the bare earth has yielded him to man's destruction in order to realize the vision he shares with Apemantus: "Set them into confounding odds, that beasts/ May have the world in empire" (384-385).

Timon begins this destruction as word spreads of his newfound wealth. Two thieves seek out Timon, and like the whores before them, Timon gives them gold and encourages them to continue to flourish in their profession: "You must eat men" (4.3.418). The painter and poet who sought patronage in the play's opening scene also seek out Timon, having heard rumors that his fall had been "but a try for his friends" (5.1.9-10). Though the artists have no works to offer Timon, they fall back on a different kind of artifice, the art of promising:

Promising is the very air o'th'time; it opens the eyes of expectation. Performance is ever the duller for his act, and but in the plainer and simpler kind of people the deed of saying is quite out of use. To promise is most courtly and fashionable. Performance is a kind of will or testament which argues a great sickness in his judgement that makes it. (5.1.23-28).

The poet and painter have brought the artifice of the court to the wilderness, and this time, Timon's ability to recognize it is signaled by his hidden presence onstage as the two artists

discuss their strategy for courting him. Now Timon recognizes not only the corruption of these artists, but that their primary corruption must be, by extension, present in the art they create: “[*aside*] Must thou needs stand for a villain in thine own work? Wilt thou whip thine own faults in other men? Do so; I have gold for thee” (5.1.35-37). In this recognition, Timon sees art as yet another avenue for spreading the destruction of men, and so he gives gold to the artists like the whores and thieves before them, but not before turning them against one another by promising each more gold for murdering the other.

Timon’s devoted and honest steward Flavius finally finds his old master, and the encounter serves to teach the misanthrope that he was wrong to condemn all men equally. Flavius’ devotion comes close to subduing Timon’s hate: “Had I a steward/ So true, so just, and now so comfortable/ It almost turns my dangerous nature mild. . . Forgive my general and exceptless rashness,/ You perpetual sober gods! I do proclaim/ One honest man” (4.3.482-489). But still Timon suspects kindness and cannot reconcile Flavius’ love with what he now understands of human nature: “But tell me true – / For I must ever doubt, thou ne’er so sure – / Is not thy kindness subtle, covetous,/ A usuring kindness, and, as rich men deal gifts,/ Expecting in return twenty for one?” (4.3.498-502). Timon’s suspicion reflects not only the false flatteries he previously enjoyed, but his own “usuring kindness” with which he bought this praise. Flavius tries to teach his former master that affection can exist independent of the economic self-interest to which it was always tied in Athens: “That which I show, heaven knows, is merely love,/ Duty and zeal to your unmatched mind,/ Care of your food and living; and, believe it,/ My most honoured lord,/ For any benefit that points to me,/ Either in hope or present, I’d exchange/ For this one wish: that you had power and wealth/ To requite me by making rich yourself” (4.3.507-514). But Timon the misanthrope is no better able to recognize and value “merely love” than

Timon the philanthropist. He gives Flavius gold and urges him to take up hate instead: “Go, live rich and happy,/ But thus conditioned . . . Hate all, curse all, show charity to none . . . Let prisons swallow ‘em,/ Debts wither ‘em to nothing” (4.3.517-523). Timon responds to Flavius’ mere love by trying to make of him the very uncharitable and unkind offender that undid him in the first place.

The Athenian senators, too – the first to abandon Timon in his need – seek him in the woods once Alcibiades’ destruction of the city is upon them. In their own time of need, the Athenian people turn to Timon as their only hope for salvation – a move which recognizes that the threat posed by Alcibiades is retribution for the ingratitude that sent both him and Timon into the wild. The senators come to Timon as emissaries of the people with apologies for this ingratitude and the promise of new honors and wealth:

They confess
Toward thee forgetfulness too general-gross
Which now the public body, which doth seldom
Play the recanter, feeling in itself
A lack of Timon’s aid, hath sense withal
Of it own fail, restraining aid to Timon;
And send forth us to make their sorrowed render,
Together with a recompense more fruitful
Than their offence can weigh down by the dram;
Ay, even such heaps and sums of love and wealth
As shall to thee blot out what wrongs were theirs,
And write in thee the figures of their love,
Ever to read them thine. (5.2.28-33)

In the senators’ apology, the language of affect and of wealth is skillfully interwoven. The senators send “sorrowed render,” “recompense . . . fruitful,” “heaps and sums of love and wealth,” enough to “blot out” their wrongs, as in an account book, and “write in . . . figures of their love.” Ingratitude is a deficit scratched out of the ledger, and love is possession of outrageous sums of wealth. But Timon is no longer susceptible to or willing to participate in this sophisticated rhetorical trick. For Timon the misanthrope, the sum of these contraries is zero.

Paradoxes of debt give way to paradoxes of nothingness: “My long sickness/ Of health and living now begins to mend,/ And nothing brings me all things. Go; live still./ Be Alcibiades your plague, and you his,/ And last so long enough” (5.2.71-75). Timon anticipates his impending suicide and wishes on both Athens and its vengeful conqueror Alcibiades mutual and absolute destruction. The only aid Timon offers his countrymen who fear the destruction that hangs over the city is the use of his tree to hang themselves.

Before the senators abandon Timon to his self-destruction and turn to face their own, Timon leaves them and the people of Athens with this highly constructed, and conflicted, parting message:

Come not to me again, but say to Athens,
Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
Upon the beached verge of the salt flood,
Who once a day with his embossed froth
The turbulent surge shall cover. Thither come,
And let my gravestone be your oracle.
Lips, let four words go by, and language end.
What is amiss, plague and infection mend.
Graves only be men’s works, and death their gain.
Sun, hide thy beams. Timon hath done his reign. (5.2.99-109)

Like the senators’ solicitations, Timon’s message is itself full of contraries, most notably: “Come not. . . Thither come.” Timon’s death, a release from the artifice and predations of men, is a highly artificial construction. Not only is it self-imposed and precisely timed – “I was writing of my epitaph,/ It will be seen tomorrow” (5.2.70-71) – but it seeks to make in the natural world what Timon lost, but never really possessed, in civil society: “an everlasting mansion” where he will be daily attended by the loving visitation of the sea, whose “salt flood” will stand in for the tears, the affection, he desired of men. Timon is guilty, then, of doing precisely what Apemantus accused him of in their encounter in the wild; he attempts to make a flatterer of the natural world. And yet, for all his misanthropy, Timon cannot be satisfied with nature’s false attendance alone.

He urges Athenians to make of his grave “an oracle” and describes his grave as “his work” and death as “his gain” or profit. Timon’s confusion – concerning love and wealth, nature and artifice – proves inherent to language, man’s greatest artifice, and he ultimately identifies relief from his suffering with the end of language: “Lips, let four words go by, and language end.” Following this speech, the First Senator observes of Timon that “His discontents are unremovably/ Coupled to nature” (5.2.109-110). The Norton glosses this line as meaning that Timon’s discontents are “intrinsic to his nature,” but the play has made a case for reading this line more broadly, as not simply referring to Timon’s individual nature, but more generally to nature in decay. We have seen this cosmology in the hostile wild surrounding Athens from which Alcibiades intends to bring the city’s downfall and in the predatory economic relations of Athens which wrought Alcibiades’ revenge in the first place. We have also seen it in the corrupted language of sociability that combines love and wealth and the natural and artificial in ways that obscure the true nature of social relations, confuse the underlying ties that bind, and raise the question of what precisely citizens and civic leaders, friends and allies, and masters and servants owe to one another in the first place.

Timon’s self-destruction is not followed by the mutual destruction he wished upon Athens and Alcibiades’ conquering forces. Rather his excessive hate is corrected by a strange compromise effected by the Athenian senators’ “usuring kindness.” In the parley with Alcibiades before the city gates, the senators remind the captain that “[w]e were not all unkind, nor all deserve/ the common stroke of war” (5.5.21-22). The senators insist that those who were guilty of ingratitude are no longer living: “Shame that they wanted cunning, in excess,/ Hath broke their hearts” (28-29). They propose that in place of the “common stroke” (22) and “confusion” (52) of war, Alcibiades exact a calculated “redress” for his grievances: “March,

noble lord,/ Into our city with thy banners spread./ By decimation and a tithed death,/ If thy revenges hunger for that food/ Which nature loathes, take thou the destined tenth,/ And by hazard of the spotted die/ Let die the spotted” (5.5.29-34). Not for the first time in this play presumably affective actions – gift-giving and hospitality, warfare and revenge, the rituals that nurture or sever ties of alliance – take on a distinctly economic form. The senators describe the penalty they propose as a “tithed death.” In its specific formulation as taking ten percent, it actually mimics legal interest rather than usury, which is alluded to often earlier in the play when gifts are described as bringing a twenty-fold return. Alcibiades accepts the compromise, promising to kill only “[t]hose enemies of Timon’s and mine own” (56). Furthermore, the play’s presumptive hero describes the balance this “tithed death” achieves in somewhat more poetic language than the senators: “I will use the olive with my sword,/ Make war breed peace, make peace stint war, make each/ Prescribe to other as each other’s leech” (87-89). Unlike Timon, Alcibiades is able to make something more than nothing of the contraries language and this constructed compromise bring together. In the end, the discord of the world in decay which infects language as well as the affective foundation of social relations in Athens with predatory economic forms, must be made somehow productive. The play ends then with this pragmatic solution – interest, a form we have seen yoking economics and affection previously and in the very form we find it in here, legal revenge.

The question in the end then is how to value Timon’s excessive, self-destructive response to the ingratitude and discord of the world in decay (or in pervasive and structural economic transition) against Alcibiades’ pragmatic compromise. We tend to locate early modern norms of virtue in the mean, far from Timon’s beginning or end. Yet, there is something about Alcibiades’ compromise that feels like a deal with the devil. At best, Alcibiades is the Fortinbras to Timon’s

Hamlet; if being *right* in a rotten world means living on in the shadow of the infinitely, irrevocably, self-indulgently, and eloquently wronged protagonist, then perhaps we'd rather be wrong.

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