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From maiden to whore and back again: A survey of prostitution in the works of William Shakespeare

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From Maiden to Whore and Back Again: A Survey of Prostitution
in the Works of William Shakespeare

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Table of Contents

Abstract	
Chapter One	1
Introduction	1
Chapter Two	8
Historical Background	8
Chapter Three	16
Critical Survey	16
Chapter Four	23
The Plays	23
The Comedies	23
The Histories	33
The Tragedies	41
The Romances	50
Chapter Five	
Conclusion	55
Bibliography	57

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In the Works of William Shakespeare

Tiffany Lowden

ABSTRACT

The works of William Shakespeare reflect the society in which he lived, and they can therefore be studied for the light they shed upon certain aspects of this society that may otherwise have been ignored or misrepresented by other surviving documents. This is especially true of prostitution. Women in this shifting English society were marginalized, and the prostitute occupied an especially precarious place since her profession identified her as an outsider, legally and morally. Surviving historical documents address the legality or morality of this institution, but fail to reveal how it was perceived by society as a whole. Shakespeare receives much praise for his keen observations of human behavior, so his plays can be seen as a type of historical document themselves. I am interested in how the characters of prostitutes function in his oeuvre and whether they uphold or subvert the attitudes implied by the other existing documents and scholarship on the topic.

Chapter One

Introduction

Escalus: How do you live, Pompey? By being a bawd? What do you think of the trade, Pompey? Is it a lawful trade?

Pompey: If the law would allow it, sir.

Escalus: But the law will not allow it, Pompey; nor it shall not be allowed in Vienna.

Pompey: Does Your Worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?

Escalus: No, Pompey.

Pompey: Truly, sir, in my poor opinion they will to't then. If Your Worship will take order for the drabs and the knaves, you need not fear the bawds.

-William Shakespeare, *Measure For Measure* (2.1.223-34)

This passage from William Shakespeare's problem comedy, set in Vienna, could have just as easily have occurred in London where the Bard wrote it. Indeed, if the word "bawds" is changed to "bards," then an interesting connection between prostitution and the theater emerges in this exchange between Pompey, a self-professed bawd, and Escalus, a government official. During Shakespeare's life, when the professional theater developed in England, tensions arose between those involved in theater and those interested in preserving the morality of a rapidly changing society; these tensions also

existed between those in the sex industry, such as prostitutes and bawds, and the social conservatives, such as the Puritans, who launched many rhetorical attacks upon both industries. Detractors generally linked the theater with prostitution in three specific attacks against the theater: moralists objected to the theater's physical space being used by prostitutes to meet potential clients; they also feared that the subject matter offered in the plays would encourage patrons to act immorally; and, finally, they simply equated the theater with prostitution itself.

Shortly after the theaters opened in England, criticism began to appear. A pamphlet attributed to H. Middleton, published in 1581, warned that dance, theater, and prostitution were all violations of the Christian commandment against adultery, and its lengthy title, *A Treatise of daunses wherin it is shewed, that they are as it were accessories and depe[n]dants (or thinges annexed) to whoredome, where also by the way is touched and proved, that playes are joyned and knit together in a rancke or rowe with them*, clearly reveals a conflation of the theater and prostitution. Puritan Philip Stubbes, in *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), makes a stronger claim against the theater:

Do they not maintain bawdry, insinuate foolery, and renew the remembrance of heathen idolatry? Do they not induce whoredom and uncleanness? Nay, are they not rather plain devourers of maidenly virginity and chastity? For proof whereof but mark the flocking and running to Theaters and Curtains, daily and hourly, night and day, time and tide, to see plays and interludes, where such wanton gestures, such bawdy speeches, such laughing and fleering, such kissing and bussing, such clipping and culling, such winking and glancing of wanton eyes, and

the like is used, as is wonderful to behold. (qtd. in Evans 11)

The passage emphasizes the perceived seductive power of drama by explicitly accusing the theater of indoctrinating innocent woman into prostitution and teaching them the gestures to then tempt others. The school metaphor also appears in other attacks on the theater. John Northbrook rails against the stage in his 1577 *Treatise*: “Satan hath not a more speedie way, and fitter schoole to work and teach his desire, to bring men and women into his snare of concupiscence and filthie lustes of wicked whoredome, than those places, and playes, and theatres are” (qtd. in Cook 272). Satan, the great tempter of Western Civilization, appears to be the driving force behind both of the “vices” of theater and prostitution, and reasoning embedded within this rhetorical attack finds its origin in the Fall, a subject which became more prominent in English society after the nation’s shift from Catholicism to Protestantism. As a result of the increased tensions between the Catholic doctrine of confession and forgiveness and the Protestant doctrine of Original Sin, stressing Eve’s transgressive role in the Fall, attitudes about sexuality became more conflicted and pronounced during this time than ever before. As Ruth Mazo Karras, referring to the Augustinian paradox that this “evil” institution actually benefits society, explains, “Medieval society recognized prostitution as a necessary evil. Sinful men, theologians held, would corrupt respectable women--even their wives--or turn to sodomy if they did not have the prostitute as a sexual outlet” (399). Anxiety about female sexuality emerged in the sixteenth century in response to the nation’s religious shift, as did apprehension about the theater; Protestants were especially concerned about the theater because they saw a close relation between it and the rituals of the Catholic Church (Tesch 2-3). Prostitutes offered a vulnerable, visible target for those who desired to

eradicate sin from English society, as did the developing institution of the theater.

Stephen Gosson, in his famous anti-theatrical tome, *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), decries the presence of prostitutes in English theaters:

I have no doubt but the cause would be feared to dry up the effect, and these prettie Rabbets very cunningly ferretted from their borrowes. For they that lack Customers al the weeke, either because their haunte is unknowen, or the Constables and Officers of their Parishe, watch them so narrowly, that they dare not queatche; To celebrate the Sabboth, flock to Theaters, and there keepe a generall Market of Bawdrie: Not that any filthynesse in deede, is committed within the compasse of that ground, as was doone in *Rome*, but that every wanton and his Parmour, every man and his Mistresse, every John and his Joan, every knave and his queane, are there first acquainted and cheapen the Merchandise in that place, which they pay for elsewhere as they can agree. (C2)

The theater obviously shared both physical and metaphysical spaces with prostitution; in addition to being located in the Liberties district of London, both institutions were conflated into one entity by many of their detractors in their treatises. Joseph Lenz observes that such critics metaphorically merged the theater with prostitution to produce “an image the professional actor, playwright, and theater-owner helped to define and were defined by and to which they responded with ambivalence” (833). This ambivalence towards an association with prostitution appears in the works of Shakespeare, as well; prostitution functions as more than a passing insult in eight of his plays, which means that it appears in roughly a fifth of his oeuvre. This relatively high percentage of references to

prostitution suggests that Shakespeare, like many others during this time, possessed a heightened interest in prostitution and its implications for his society. This thesis seeks to present a comprehensive view of how Shakespeare constructs a narrative on the topic of prostitution in his society.

Although censure and derogation dominated the contemporary discourse on the subject, ambivalence about prostitution dates back to its earliest documentation in England. Fernando Henriques traces this ambivalent response to a statement by St. Augustine, whose works greatly influenced Western thought, in which Augustine states, “Suppress prostitution, and capricious lusts will overthrow society,” (qtd. in Henriques 25).¹ Henriques proposes that this statement “might be taken as the germ of the idea of the double standard in sexual mores” (25). St. Thomas Aquinas also urged tolerance for prostitution, albeit to a lesser degree than Augustine, suggesting, “in human government also, those who are in authority, rightly tolerate certain evils, lest certain goods be lost, or certain greater evils be incurred” (2-2.10.11). A pattern emerges in the rhetoric used against prostitution, which can be summed up as follows: the men who engaged in this behavior were tempted to surrender to their natural lusts by the prostitutes (and their bawds), who profited from them. Anti-theatrical dogma expresses this same attitude in many of its virulent tracts; Lenz makes the connection explicit, contending that the anti-theatrical polemicists believed that “[l]ike a brothel, the theater houses ‘some lewd intrigue of Fornication’; like a bawd, it advertises its product with effeminate gesture and

¹ An interesting biographical fact about St. Augustine reveals his own weakness in this area; he had a thirteen-year relationship with a concubine who eventually bore him a son. Perhaps because of this relationship, St. Augustine remained conflicted about sexuality and its purpose in life, even though his view on the topic greatly influenced Western thoughts and practices. See Jay Wood’s “What Would Augustine Say” in Christian History 19.3 for further analysis of Augustine’s conflict with human sexuality.

costly apparel; like a prostitute, the motive is the same---money. Thus, the theater is a brothel, a pander, a whore, a way toward debauchery and a site for it” (John Disney qtd. in Lenz 833). Each aspect of the theater functions as temptation in this analogy, making it seem as if the theater, like the brothel, is motivated by ulterior motives beyond the industry’s desire to provide entertainment.

One specific aspect of the theater particularly offended the anti-theatrical opposition: men and boys portraying women on stage. David Mann relates the English custom that was popular in Shakespeare’s time back to Roman theater practices, noting that the criticism that accompanied the Roman tradition followed the same conventions and often relied upon the same objections and examples (162-3). In particular, moralists objected to the appearance of boys dressed as women onstage, which Jonas Barish argues embodied the Puritans’ opposition to “the supposed scriptural injunction against men in women’s dress, with its implicit threat to the proper division between the sexes” (89). These boy-actors posed a double threat because they appeared to violate not only moral sensibilities, but they also threatened the rigid gender boundaries that were already in flux due to the increased presence of women outside of the home. The boy-actors, like the women who worked as prostitutes, blurred the line between respectable and scandalous behavior, thus making them an easy target for moralists to attack.

As evidenced by their efforts to regulate this activity, society attempted to control, rather than eradicate, prostitution, perhaps agreeing with Augustine that in order for society to remain stable, it requires a sexual outlet for its male citizens (although, significantly, not its female ones). Additionally, Henriques frames the issue as an economic one: “If this manner of satisfying man’s sexual passions is inevitable why

should not the community profit instead of the vicious individuals?" (46). Eventually, both the state and the Church became involved with licensing stews so that they could share in the profits. In any case, society in general tolerated both the prostitution and theater districts, which continued to flourish despite the efforts of increasingly vocal critics. Within this tense atmosphere, Shakespeare wrote and produced some of the most highly praised works in all of English literature. This study seeks to discover how these tensions shaped his work: while a general ambivalence permeates the plays in which prostitution appears, Shakespeare, in his own subtle way, demonstrates a remarkable sympathy for prostitutes and the way that society simultaneously uses and marginalizes them, in a manner similar to its treatment of playwrights, actors, and theater-owners. I assert that because the criticism of both prostitution and the theater contained similar rhetoric, Shakespeare portrays prostitution cautiously, knowing full well that to do otherwise could result in the use of his own works in the criticism against his industry.

Chapter Two

Historical Background

England has a long history of prostitution, with documentation dating back to Archbishop Aelfric's *Glossarium* (AD 1000), in which the word *hor-hus* (whorehouse) first appears (Burford and Wotton 9). Quite early, prostitution became a lucrative, licensed industry; William the Conqueror personally owned "several well-known brothels in Rouen in Normandy," and, after his invasion of England in 1066, several of his Flemish prostitutes "were soon to be found to be running the stews on the Bankside in Southwark, which had been licensed by the Bishop of Winchester in Henry II's Ordinance of 1161" (Burford and Wotton 9). The Church also saw the potential for profit, as evidenced by Pope Sixtus IV (c. A.D. 1471), who was "the first pope to license prostitution and to subject their earnings to an income tax, thus swelling the papal coffers" (Haselkorn 9). For the most part, these types of establishments were either frequented or overlooked by the ruling class until "Henry VII closed down the Bankside whorehouses in 1505 because of the outbreak of syphilis which had struck the continent" (Burford and Woford 10). The establishments later re-opened in 1506, only to be closed in 1546 by Henry VIII, again due to an outbreak of syphilis; however, his son, Edward VI, allowed them to operate again under his rule (Burford and Woford 11). By all accounts, the temporary closings accomplished little other than force the prostitutes to

relocate, with most of them making their way into London proper (Shugg 294). By the reign of Elizabeth I, these businesses still operated under the “guise of bath-houses—bagnios—and as ale-houses and taverns” (Burford and Woford 11).

Since the 1970s, when Wallace Shuggs published his article titled “Prostitution in Shakespeare’s London,” historians have shown an increased interest in prostitution during both the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, perhaps because the topic appeals to many different schools of postmodern theory, including Feminism, Cultural Materialism, and New Historicism. Leah Lydia Otis identifies three areas of the topic that have generated much interest: “the history of marginal social groups, the history of women, and the history of sexuality” (1). Her 1985 study, set in the Languedoc region of Southern France, explores the different forces shaping prostitution during the High and Late Middle Ages. She emphasizes that the Church had a particularly important influence throughout Europe and identifies its “position on prostitution, crystallized by the fourth century, . . . [as consisting of] these three elements: acceptance of prostitution as an inevitable social fact, condemnation of those profiting from this commerce, and encouragement for the prostitute to repent” (13). Otis also notes that the emergence of Protestantism eventually led to the decline of institutionalized prostitution throughout England and the rest of Europe from the sixteenth century on (43). Both Luther and Calvin vehemently opposed prostitution, and Luther in particular envisioned “a new image of man and society, at the heart of which was a new sexual morality,” one that scorned all forms of fornication and urged limiting sexual relations to the confines of marriage (Otis 43). Sixteenth century Protestant reformers renewed their efforts to redeem prostitutes, resulting in the closure of brothels in several European cities, and the

split from the Catholic Church perhaps led Protestants to “encourage . . . women to learn to read and to participate in religious services and revalorized the role of wife and mother, [and] they limited women’s activities strictly to the home and emphasized the subordination of women to their husbands’ will” (Otis 42). The existence of prostitutes, who worked outside of the home and lacked male supervision, obviously posed a threat to the Puritans who led the fight to eradicate sin from English society.

Ecclesiastical courts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries developed their own methods of dealing with prostitution, distinct from the English courts of justice. Although prostitution, “in most places . . . was forbidden except in particular streets or (especially in smaller towns) in one particular brothel,” it nonetheless flourished throughout Europe (Karras 403). However, in an attempt to control errant behavior, both Catholic and Protestant churches dealt with prostitution in a more relaxed manner beginning with the fourteenth century. R.M. Helmholz makes the argument that, although ecclesiastical courts commonly prosecuted persons guilty of harboring (or fostering) others who engaged in unlawful sexual conduct (258), they often ignored the offences of the individual who engaged in the act. Helmholz, a law professor, looks specifically at how the Ecclesiastical courts eventually sought to prosecute such persons, and his study excludes those directly involved in the act, instead focusing on bawds and others who permitted or encouraged such activities. He finds that most of the accused who were found guilty were sentenced to public penance, but notes that a vast majority were often found not guilty in the eyes of the Catholic and Anglican Churches (261). He concludes that social values were changing to keep up with the times, rather than traditional values being discarded altogether. As Anne M. Haselkorn explains, “though it [the church]

continued to rail against licentiousness and unlawful sex, it now joined the throne in profiting from the illicit business known as ‘couillage.’ Though this practice was especially prevalent in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, ‘couillage’ actually came into being when the celibacy was forced on the priesthood (A.D. 1080)” (9). Under this practice, priests were allowed to keep “focari,” or hearth girls, who were essentially church-sanctioned concubines, and this custom continued until 1540 when Henry VIII abolished the monasteries (Haselkorn 9). As noted earlier, even after the Reformation, certain parishes also participated in licensing brothels in order to share in the profits. Because so many institutions viewed prostitution ambiguously, the custom continued to flourish during Shakespeare’s lifetime.

Not every historian agrees with the common assumption that the Catholic Church was not only complicit in prostitution, but that it profited from this practice, as well. Henry Ansgar Kelly asserts that too much has been extrapolated from the few key documents that have formed the basis for this assumption, including several by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. He endorses a “more cautious and conservative approach” (350) and, applying a linguistic strategy, disputes the actual number of stews, or bordellos, in Southwark associated with the Church. However, historians of Kelly’s persuasion remain in the minority.

Karras examines the same period of history in England, positing that by the late Middle Ages “[t]he recognition of the existence of commercial prostitutes, whose sin, however, was formally defined as their promiscuity rather than their selling of their bodies, allowed the conflation of all deviant feminine sexuality with venality and the assimilation of all disorderly women with prostitutes” (“Sex” 201). She describes the

regulations that local authorities enacted in order to keep some control of prostitution, including restrictions on mobility, clothing, jewelry, and church attendance, lest a respectable woman be mistaken for a whore (“Regulation” 403). In her collection on prostitution in Medieval England, Karras “argue[s] that prostitution deeply affected gender relations because its existence fostered the connection of feminine sexuality with venality and sin, and thereby justified the control of all women” (*Common Women* 3). Her analyses in “The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England,” “Sex, Money, and Prostitution in Medieval English Culture,” and *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* offer valuable insight into late medieval culture and the important yet marginal position that the institution of commercial sex occupied in it. In particular, she reveals the deep-rooted misogyny that allowed society to both condemn prostitution as an evil institution and benefit from it by using the existence of this practice as a powerful argument for the stricter regulation of all women. Karras sees prostitution as a method of subverting the economic security of marriage, thus allowing single women to gain a modicum of independence within a strict patriarchal society. By condemning prostitution and seeking to regulate it, society could reassert its control over these wayward women.

E. J. Burford and Joy Wotton present a colorful look at just how prevalent prostitution became in English society by the time that Elizabeth assumed the throne. Their book, *Private Vices-Public Virtues: Bawdry in London from Elizabethan Times to the Regency*, details how beginning towards the end of Elizabeth’s strict rule and continuing into James’s rather lenient one, the brothels around London became more luxurious. According to Burford and Wotton, James permitted both bawds and prostitutes

to conduct business in his court, and private brothels began to appear, as well (20-4). The authors note that the number of these houses increased so drastically that the “easy-going James was compelled in 1622 to issue an Ordinance” whose aim was “to restrain the shamless Weomen . . . Bawds who entertained and lured men into divers Howses for base and filthie lucre . . . ackrewinge to the private Benefitt of the Landlordes . . . by sitting outside their Dores . . . and beckoning in the clients” (24). The wording of this ordinance reflects the common anxiety concerning corrupting influences that existed among many in English society, and many suspected that the same influences could be found within the theater, as well. Temptation could be found in an increasing number of sites within society, it seems. Steven Mullaney explains the position of prostitution in Elizabethan and Jacobean society, which also relates to the position of the theater:

Displaced into the margins of the city and licensed to operate there, prostitution is both a remedy for lust and a precipitator of it, both an antidote to the ills that infect the body politic and a source of further contagion. With social ills and vices that admit of no final solution, efforts to contain or displace them will be tinged with paradox, haunted by an irreducible margin of ambiguity. (42)

Those within society viewed the prostitutes and theater workers on the outside of society as Others and feared contamination from them, yet they continued to patronize both brothels and theaters. This paradox identified by Mullaney explains why reformers objected so vigorously to prostitution and the theater, and how in their writings the two institutions became conflated into one looming threat to society.

Gustav Ungerer utilizes recent historical works that examine the Bridewell Court

Books, which record the court proceedings for the men and women who were accused of either prostitution or bawdry, in an attempt to recover the individual voices of the women whose names appear in these records. He states his desire:

to rescue from oblivion and anonymity a group of women who have been denied their individual voices. I have ventured to unlock, empirically and paradigmatically, the reality as experienced by the following bawds and prostitutes . . . particularly by Mary Newborough, the wife of George Newborough, gentleman turned highwayman, in the closing years of the sixteenth and the early years of the seventeenth century. (138-39)

He traces Mary's fall and redemption, beginning with her marriage to a gentleman, to her economic hardship which forced her to turn to prostitution to survive, to her prosecution and repentance after several visits to prison. Ungerer's purpose is to "break . . . new ground in reclaiming what has been considered to be virtually irrecoverable: the individual experience of a woman fallen to the level of prostitution; the authentic voice of a supposedly voiceless miscreant; the culinary predilections of a sophisticated mistress; and the spirited resistance of an undaunted detainee" (140). He meticulously narrates Mary's story, filling in any gaps with additional research on related cases. Ungerer also confirms the lack of punishment for the prostitute's male customers and the inability of the Liberties district effectively to contain prostitution after the brothel closings in the 1540s (141). His work sheds light upon the historical situations in which Shakespeare was writing that were previously deemed irrevocably lost. The focus of these historical examinations, which has shifted from describing the conditions in which prostitutes lived and worked, to defending their choices as necessary for survival in a hostile patriarchal

society, and finally to recovering their experiences in an attempt to fully understand the lives of women who worked as prostitutes, reflects the general scholarly trends of favoring a less-biased, more inclusive approach to research. These types of historical perspectives also provide additional insight into the lives of the real-life women behind the characters that appear in Shakespeare's plays.

Chapter Three

Critical Survey

Most of the criticism on prostitution and Shakespeare focuses only on a single work—*Measure for Measure*. Moreover, critics did not begin studying the topic in earnest until the 1980s, although a few pioneering works date back to the '70s. In 1977, Shugg published an article, "Prostitution in Shakespeare's London," which blends together historical documents and an analysis of various works of literature, including several by Shakespeare, in an attempt to understand the political, religious, economic, and social atmospheres of the time. Shugg discusses the actual establishments where many fictional characters, including those of Shakespeare, may have sought the company of women, and he even mentions that the entertainment districts shared borders with the prostitution districts, an observation that others would develop more fully later on (296-97).

Ann Jennalie Cook published an interesting article in *Shakespeare Quarterly* that tries to distinguish the extent to which prostitution actually occurred within the theaters during the time that Shakespeare lived. She finds some detailed accounts in documents, such as those written by the anti-theatrical pamphleteer Anthony Munday, who was among the most vocal in his opposition to the theater. He published many tracts denouncing the theater as the "chapel of Satan," and he made an explicit connection

between the theater and prostitution, warning contemporaries, “So that in the representation of whoredome, al the people in mind plaie the whores. And such as happily came chast unto the showes, returne adulterers from plaies” (qtd. in Cook 274-5). Cook then describes how Munday and other Puritans recount specific instances of virtuous women having been corrupted during a theater visit, and while Munday was unique in the sheer volume of material that he produced on this topic, he was not alone in the message that he promoted. Cook states that non-Puritanical anti-theatrical writings did not appear until the 1590s, and while many of the subsequent pamphlets do not offer such harsh judgments concerning the presence of prostitutes and other “loose” women in the playhouses, many others continue to criticize the theater as a place inextricably linked to immoral sexual practices (278). She observes that “[p]layhouses were not brothel houses, but neither were they innocent assemblies of spectators solely intent upon the aesthetic satisfactions of the performance. The theaters apparently deserved their reputation as excellent places for men to meet women of all degrees of availability” (286). Additionally, she concludes that the audiences were primarily composed of sexually sophisticated, middle- to upper-class patrons who expected to be entertained not only by the actors on stage, but by the behavior of those in the audience, as well.

Haselkorn’s book, *Prostitution in Elizabethan and Jacobean Comedy*, divides a selection of plays into interesting categories; she judges the works of Ben Jonson, William Shakespeare, and John Marston as representations of the Cavalier View; Thomas Middleton’s works coincide with the Liberal View; and, finally, Thomas Dekker’s plays reinforce the Puritan View. Haselkorn defines the Cavalier position as “having felt no obligation to reclaim the prostitute, nor to despair at the immensity of the task.

Punishments . . . are accepted, not to reform, but as concomitant of prostitution” (20).

This view neither condemns nor approves of prostitution; rather, it recognizes it as an inevitable part of society. Haselkorn further argues that this ambivalence often results in a satirical, humorous portrayal of prostitutes who often turn to the practice in order to survive (20-21). She believes that playwrights reflecting a Cavalier attitude simply mirror the imperfections of the times in which they lived, rather than urging reform. Prostitution appears in the works of Cavalier writers as they perceive it in their culture, and it is portrayed without judgment.

Pierre L. Horn and Mary Beth Pringle further examine the archetypes of the prostitute in their introduction to *The Image of the Prostitute in Modern Literature*; they describe the ways in which she has been utilized by male authors over the centuries and argue that her use as a “symbol . . . reveal[s] the patriarchal values and themes of the male writers who depicted her” (2). They identify several categories into which most prostitute characters can be placed, including: the bitch-witch, the femme fatale, the weak-but-wonderful prostitute, the saved prostitute, the sinner-but-survivor prostitute, the seduced-and-abandoned prostitute, the hapless harlot, the proud pro, and the cast-of-thousands (2-6). Horn and Pringle also remind us of an important point to keep in mind: “[t]he reader, like the critics, will bring to the study of prostitution as literary image his or her own intellectual and emotional viewpoints,” thus adding exponentially to the number of interpretations available for any single literary work (7).

Continuing the trend of examining the criteria which can taint modern readers’ understanding of the past, Jean E. Howard, in *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*, declares, “In this book I am going to examine the political

consequences of the way a variety of Renaissance texts, but especially and particularly stage plays, represent those people and groups who engage in theatrical practices” (3). She is interested in the “power of language . . . to make crucial political and ideological distinctions between similar phenomena” (3). Her work attempts to reconcile what was represented onstage and what was occurring in English theater culture and society around the time that Shakespeare wrote his plays. Howard believes that in order fully to understand “the ideological function of Renaissance theater one must attend—not just to the ideological import of dramatic narratives considered as if they were the equivalent of a printed prose tale—but also to the whole ensemble of practices attendant upon theatrical production at the public theater” (13).

Others who study this topic have recently shifted their focus to examine the historical process through which we attempt to understand how prostitutes lived and thought of themselves. John Dollimore posits in his essay, “Prostitution,” which appears in *Political Shakespeare*, that prostitutes are “doubly *spoken* for: that is, others lay claim to them even as they speak for them; they are possessed both sexually and politically” (135). He asserted in an earlier essay that “this actual absence, this actual silence, is one of the most revealing indications of the extent of their powerlessness and exploitation in a culture and a theater which obsessively invokes them,” an argument which he feels was misinterpreted by Carol Thomas Neely and Brian Vickers, both of whom criticized Dollimore’s conclusions as continuing to silence female characters or attempting to evoke sympathy for them (136). Dollimore quotes Karras to make a point that the prostitutes themselves left behind no surviving documents to give voice to their own attitudes about their profession or identity; we are only left with fragmented historical

documents from which to construct a history (137). He continues the article with an examination of the political ramifications of the treatment of prostitutes in Shakespeare's works, including *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, and *2 Henry IV*.

Duncan Salkeld employs general historical analyses to examine the problem; he uses Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and the issue of prostitution to offer an example of the issues that arise in such historical studies, and he frequently cites Dollimore's book on Shakespeare. He discovers a "double-bind" in Dollimore's assertion that the prostitutes in *Measure for Measure* are silenced (they never speak; only the bawds do); however, he unfortunately attempts to speak for them himself:

One way of evaluating this powerfully stated interpretation is to look for evidence within history and the literary text to see if the textual silence of prostitutes in this period generally might corroborate its claims. Such evidence is not thick on the ground, and resides, it seems, only in the sketchy, problematic and incomplete legal records that have come down to us from the early modern period. (18)

His article moves on to offer accounts of actual court proceedings that document a real-life Kate Keepdown. The conclusion reemphasizes the difficulties that modern critics and historians face in their search to rediscover these "silenced" voices of the past, primarily because we have only modern language and words to put in their mouths. Nonetheless, Salkeld believes that these types of characters "add to our understanding of Shakespeare's play since clearly the prostitutes are not at all silent, either in the play, or in the historical record" (25). He then poses two important questions for critics:

why should Shakespeare put these words into the mouth of a prostitute?

And, on whose behalf does Mistress Overdone speak? The second of these questions, I would hazard, is more important than the first. Certainly, she speaks on her own behalf, and on Kate Keepdown's also—but from the testimonies of Mawdlin Johnson, Hellen Palmer, Elizabeth Morgan and the many others noted in the Bridewell Minute Books, it might reasonably be concluded that she speaks on behalf of innumerable others. *In other words, she is, perhaps, the play's most historical voice. Far from merely rehearsing deeply entrenched prejudices against women in general, and prostitutes in particular, the words Mistress Overdone utters complicate our attitude towards the sexual misogyny on which the play is predicated.* And so we face the first question regarding authorial intent, for the voice of the prostitute makes it much less easy to assume that such misogyny was an attitude Shakespeare wished to indulge. (25, emphasis mine)

In this passage, Salkeld identifies two obstacles to this study: first, these female characters are voiced by a male author, which complicates any feminist interpretation of them, and second, he questions whether it is possible to assume authorial intent with any degree of certainty. In regards to the first issue, I argue that Shakespeare excelled at creating both male and female characters, many of whom exhibit remarkable psychological depth, which is perhaps one of the reasons that his plays still seem so universal and alive to modern audiences. As for the question of authorial intent, like many others, I recognize that unless journals or other records by Shakespeare that shed light on his intentions were to be discovered, any such speculation remains just that--speculation. However, in this thesis, I hope to show that the circumstantial evidence

found in both his plays and the historical conditions in which they were produced suggests that the playwright was sympathetic to the plight of those who found employment in the sex industry.

Like the accompanying historical scholarship, literary criticism of the last few decades on the topic of prostitution in Early Modern England strives to offer a more holistic account of life as a prostitute. Employing literature, court documents, pamphlets, and public record, we now know more than ever before, but we also must remind ourselves of the danger of placing words into the mouths of these women because such accounts, despite the intentions of those who attempt to recover their voices, still bear traces of contemporary language and reasoning which is quite different from that spoken and used by the female prostitutes themselves.

Chapter Four

The Plays

Prostitution appears in eight of Shakespeare's plays, not including the random insults scattered throughout many of his other works. Surprisingly, prostitution occurs in the histories more often than any other genre. In the following section, adhering to the strategies of most editors, I organize my analyses of the plays by genre. First, I examine the comedies, including *The Comedy of Errors* and *Measure for Measure*; the histories follow, including both parts of *King Henry IV* and *The Life of King Henry V*; next, the tragedies *Othello* and *Timon of Athens* receive attention; finally, a consideration of Shakespeare's late romance *Pericles* completes my survey.

In one of his earliest plays, *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare makes an interesting use of a courtesan, an individual trained to accommodate nobles and other high-class gentlemen. David Bevington comments that Shakespeare greatly reduced the courtesan's role from its original source, a play by the classical Roman playwright Plautus, perhaps to adapt the often-racy original text to English moral principles (Bevington 3). In Plautus's *Menaechmi* (c. 184 B.C.), the character of the courtesan, Erotium, flaunts her sexual relationship with Menaechmus of Epidamnus, the married twin in Plautus's play. Erotium obviously desires money and gifts more than she desires her lover, and she acts far more jealously than Shakespeare's courtesan. Although

Shakespeare diminishes the courtesan role to a mere plot device and denies her a name, she performs significant actions in the play. One of the play's protagonists, Antipholus of Ephesus, carries on an affair with her, despite being married. During the course of the plot, which revolves around mistaken identity, the courtesan eventually becomes friendly with Antipholus's wife, Adriana, whom she visits in order to collect a debt owed to her by Antipholus of Ephesus. The courtesan bears witness against Antipholus in Act V; when everyone mistakenly believes that he has gone mad, she offers testimony against this upper-class gentleman. By allowing her to befriend a respectable woman, Shakespeare shows that courtesans and prostitutes possess redeeming qualities, even if such friendships were highly improbable in actual society. The courtesan accompanies Adriana throughout the remainder of the play, and despite Antipholus's affair with this other woman, Adriana never once expresses any anger at her, choosing instead to direct her animus at her husband. Because Adriana has traditionally been interpreted as "a jealous and possessive shrew," her failure to respond angrily towards the courtesan appears all the more remarkable (Kehler 231), since it seems logical that a betrayed wife would lash out at the woman who has stolen her husband's affection. While this courtesan does not inspire sympathy, neither does she evoke hatred.

Shakespeare appears to take special care to avoid making the courtesan into an object of wrath. The only two people who speak against her in the play are the two travelers, Antipholus of Syracuse and his servant, Dromio of Syracuse, but by the fourth act of the play, when they encounter her, the two confused travelers believe that they have landed in some enchanted land filled with mad men and lusty women. The two men appear frightened by the courtesan and demean her in terms reminiscent of Munday's

vitriol-filled Puritan tracts against the theater. Antipholus of Syracuse recoils when she approaches, and warns her, “Satan, avoid! I charge thee, tempt me not,” (4.3.46), and Dromio scorns her as “the devil’s dam,” adding that she “will burn,” a phrase implying that she will pass along venereal disease, as well perhaps as burn at the stake as a witch (4.3.49, 55). These phrases echo the disease imagery used in many anti-theatrical writings, and Antipholus’s fear that the courtesan will tempt him to sin recalls the common charge that the theater tempts otherwise moral people to evil, including Northbrook’s accusation that the theater offered an especially effective means for Satan to corrupt innocent audience members (Cook 272). Significantly, the courtesan does not tempt Antipholus of Syracuse, who instead weds the virtuous Luciana at the play’s conclusion; Shakespeare could very well have revised the original plot from Plautus’s comedy in order to subtly dispute the temptation claims made by critics of the theater. Lalita Pandit also argues that by the end of the play Ariana’s interests have realigned themselves with those of her husband’s, despite his dalliances with the Courtesan (104).

Shakespeare addresses more openly the criticism levied at the theater and its association with prostitution in *Measure for Measure*, which explores themes of sexuality and society’s regulation of it in much more direct terms than any other of his plays. The play deals with the tensions between those who wish to eradicate sin from Venetian society and those who either participate in the sex industry or earn their living by it. These topics particularly concerned Shakespeare’s contemporaries, and Steven Mullaney reminds us that “[r]itual and spectacle are not spontaneous; they are staged event, orchestrated manifestations of power, studied representations of authority and community” (23). Thus both the stage and the court became locations for the topical

debate about the regulation of the sex industry. Leah Marcus asserts that the Viennese setting is actually a “smokescreen,” and the real setting “is not actually Vienna; it is London, or at least a place which can easily be taken for London” (162). Marcus also points out many similarities between the fictitious setting and Shakespeare’s London, including one of particular importance:

[i]n London of 1604, as in Vienna, the ‘howses in the Suburbs’ had been ordered to be ‘pluck’d downe’ by a 1603 proclamation. In London, as in Shakespeare’s Vienna, there had been a recent heating-up of efforts to stamp out prostitution. According to one contemporary, ‘the Lord Cheife Justice . . . hath plaide rex of lateamong whoores and bawds and persecutes poore pretty wenches out of all pittie and mercy.’ Notorious brothel owners and employees from the suburbs were ostentatiously carted and whipped about London, then thrown into Newgate Prison, where they could form a reconstituted ‘house’ like the one Pompey discovers in the Viennese jail, teeming with all his old customers. (163)

Marcus also notes that one important difference existed between the fictional setting of the play and London: “London, unlike Shakespeare’s Vienna, did not punish sexual incontinence with death, but there were numerous ‘precise’ and vocal Londoners who argues, like Angelo, that it should” (163). The laws in England defining legitimate and illegal sexual relations were “very flexible in practice,” including canon law, so there were disputes over whose jurisdiction would prevail (Marcus 172). Victoria Hayne suggests that England’s ambiguous marriage process resulted with many couples forced to resolve disputes in court, a social complication of which many Londoners were

knowledgeable as they watched *Measure For Measure*, which:

exposes those ambiguities and anatomizes, in the marriages it portrays, the personal and social problems those practices could give rise to, problems ranging from the emotional toll of a ruptured betrothal to the social difficulty of accommodating and caring for illegitimate children. These issues, and how society should respond to them, were matters of active debate when *Measure for Measure* was written; books were published, sermons preached, and bills presented to Parliament defending and attacking the culture's traditional ways of dealing with these problems and proposing alternative responses. The play engages the terms of that debate, scrutinizing the varied connections between sexual license and death, connections deployed by both traditional rituals and reformist polemics.

(2)

In the play, the Duke of Vienna temporarily steps down from power, leaving Angelo, a nobleman, to attempt to curtail the rampant sexual activity, both commercial and private, that has seemingly begun to disrupt society. Late in the play, the Duke observes, “I have seen corruption boil and bubble / Till it o’errun the stew” (5.1.326-27). This reference recalls the stews of the Bankside of Brunswick, which housed the licensed brothels just south of London (Burford and Wotton 9). Mullaney points out that even though the theaters, like the brothels, “were effectively banished from the city by increasingly strict regulations, popular drama translated the terms of its exile to its advantage” (23). Officials nonetheless expected the district to contain these outcast institutions. The Duke’s statement that the corruption has boiled over alludes to the area’s

failure to contain its “sin.” Angelo’s attempt to enforce chastity represents “not only a means of restoring societal health, but also the means of retrieving or buttressing patriarchal society” (Baines 285). The tensions in the play arguably derive from this struggle between the masculine powers that seek to control female sexuality and the feminine powers that subvert those efforts. The rhetoric used by the patriarchal powers to frighten citizens, warning that diseases would overtake the boundaries and spread to other parts of society, is an effective tool to gain control through the use of fear.

In the first scene, Lucio, whom Shakespeare describes as a “fantastic,” views the situation with humor. He and another gentleman banter back and forth, calling one another such names as a “three-piled piece,” which Bevington defines as a type of dressing used on syphilitic sore (fn. 32 420). They also use the phrase, “be piled,” which Bevington glosses as to be bald as a result of syphilis treatments (fn. 33 420). Lucio jokes that he has “purchased as many diseases under her roof as come to—” (1.2.44-45). Clearly, anxiety about syphilis permeates society even though Lucio and others continue to frequent the whorehouses. Lenz observes that the threat of disease failed to dissuade patrons from attending the theater, as well, even though the danger against which anti-theatrical rhetoric warned changed from “physical to moral corruption” by the 1590s (Lenz 836). Lucio also fails to assume responsibility for his role in the spreading of disease, revealing his hypocrisy and that of other male customers who frequented the brothels around London (Stanton 87).

As mentioned previously, Salkeld suggests that Mistress Overdone, a bawd who runs her own brothel, speaks for the women who make their living in the sex trade. In Act 1, Scene 2, she and Pompey, a tapster and fellow bawd who helps her run the brothel,

discuss the recent hardships that those in the sex industry have endured. She complains that “what with the war, what/ with the sweat, what with the gallows. And what with/ poverty, I am custom-shrunk” (1.2.81-83). Mistress Overdone topically alludes to recent wars, the plague, the threat of harsh punishments to those who harbor prostitutes or their customers, and the economic depression that England had recently endured when Shakespeare wrote this play. Her assessment of the hardships faced by prostitutes illustrates their physical, legal, and economical vulnerability. As the scene continues, Pompey tells her that there is a new proclamation that calls for “all the houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down,” to which Mistress Overdone replies, “But shall all our houses of resort in the suburbs be shut down?” (1.2.95; 101-02). Pompey reassures her that she will be taken care of, but she exhibits concern because she knows of no other way to earn a living because women’s public roles were so restricted. Poor women had few choices in English society, and this trade was one of the few lucrative ones possible, even if it was not desirable. Karras speculates that women chose to become prostitutes “under severe constraints[,] . . . [that] were created in part by the structure of the economy, which excluded women from many occupations, but also by the demographic situation and opportunities for marriage” (*Common* 48). Prostitution was clearly not the ideal occupation, but it did offer many women the means for survival. Tom Flanigan recounts the numerous proclamations meant to eradicate prostitution, and he reminds us, “Shakespeare no doubt witnessed countless such official crackdowns on illicit sex in the course of his life, and yet, as modern historians have basically concluded, none of them seems to have had much significant and/or lasting effect” (42).

Later during the first trial scene (Act 2, Scene 1), Escalus and Angelo question

Pompey about his position with Mistress Overdone, whereby Pompey wittily defends the profession, asking the Duke if he means “to geld and splay all the youth of the city?” Escalus answers this jest with the serious reply, “No, Pompey” (2.1.229-31). Both men, unlike the extremist Angelo, understand that the sex drive is too powerful to eradicate from any society, a view that again coincides with Augustine’s assessment of sex and its place in society. The Provost makes a similar comment shortly after this scene, stating, “All sects, all ages smack of this vice” to express his outrage about Claudio’s impending execution (2.2.5). Later, after Pompey’s second arrest, the Duke decides that “correction and instruction must both work/ ere this rude beast will profit” (3.2.33-34). Pompey’s putative redemption lies in his acceptance of the Duke’s offer to become the hangman’s apprentice; Abhorson, however, reacts with distaste, protesting that Pompey will “discredit our mystery” (4.2.28-29). Ironically, society in this play finds it more admirable to assist in killing than to aid in copulating, particularly significant in a play that frequently debates which is more heinous, the sin of murder or the sin of fornication. For example, Angelo equates fornication (and the production of children) with murder in the following lines:

It were as good
To pardon him that hath from nature stolen
A man new made, as to remit
Their saucy sweetness that do coin heaven’s image
In stamps that are forbid. (2.4.42-46)

To which Isabella replies, “Tis set down so in heaven but not on earth” (2.4.50), thereby agreeing with Angelo that the sins are equally vile in the eyes of heaven, although the law

does not punish them equally. Arguably, Shakespeare's play is designed to counter just such an equation. Moreover, with his change in profession, Pompey's position in society alters from that of the oppressed to that of the oppressor, thus rendering his redemption highly problematic. Hayne observes that Pompey is "forced to admit that being an executioner is the more moral calling--because the executioner asks forgiveness more frequently than the bawd" (13). This reasoning appeals to the Protestant emphasis upon redemption, particularly prominent in many Puritan writings. Hayne further posits:

Ultimately the play's scrutiny of death as physical reality and as a metaphor works to loosen the connection between death and illicit sex as a consciously arguable proposition. It does so at a time when, in the world outside the theater, death as a penalty for illicit sex was, in fact, a proposition not only arguable but publicly argued. (14)

Hayne makes a valid point that the stakes in the play are not as high as the stakes in reality; Shakespeare's audience would have recognized the social policies being acted out upon the stage and felt some degree of sympathy seeing the policies dramatized by Claudio and Juliet's punishment.

Mistress Overdone, however, does not receive the same chance at redemption as Pompey. Lucio, fearing that she will implicate him in an illegitimate birth, accuses her of being a bawd, or procurer of prostitutes. However, she reveals his indiscretion upon arrest, informing those in the prison that "Mistress Kate Keepdown was with/ child by him in the Duke's time; he promised her marriage./ His child is a year and a quarter old" (3.2.194-96). Officers then escort Mistress Overdone to jail, where she presumably remains for the rest of the play. Nevertheless, the Duke later punishes Lucio, ordering

him to marry Mistress Kate before he is to be whipped and hung (5.1.518-24). At this command, Lucio pleads to the Duke not to “recompense me in making me a cuckold,” as if marrying his former prostitute is a fate worse than death; even though the Duke later retracts his death sentence, Lucio’s last lines still reflect his displeasure about his impending marriage, as he complains that “Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging” (5.1.33-34). Lucio speaks for the position that Haselkorn identifies as the Cavalier attitude (a somewhat tolerant male view concerning sex and its place in society), coupled, however, with a scorn for the prostitute herself, since “his marriage does not fall in the same category as Juliet’s and Mariana’s because there is no pre-contract”; Haselkorn insists that “the Duke is not primarily concerned with meting out justice for Lucio’s whore” (51). While Lucio’s Cavalier attitude allows him to consort with Kate, he cannot overcome his disdain for her status as a whore and accept marriage to her; if he were able to accept Kate as his wife, it would indicate an attitude akin to the Puritan one, which offers the possibility of redemption for the prostitute through marriage to a respectable man. Haselkorn rightly observes that the Duke punishes Lucio because of his earlier negative comments about him, evidenced in the Duke’s reply that “Slandering a prince deserves it” (5.1.535).

The hierarchy in this play dictates that words spoken about a ruler are more serious than abandoning one’s child and its mother. Kay Stanton proposes that, since the Duke has himself acted as a “‘lawful bawd’ in facilitating the coupling of Angelo and Mariana,” he is less likely to punish Lucio for his indiscretions with a prostitute because the process itself helps the Duke to reclaim his rightful, albeit irresolute power (88).

The histories that include prostitution all feature Falstaff, since his character

represents the merry side of life, including indulgences in food, wine, and women. Interestingly, the Hostess of the Tavern, Mistress Quickly, appears in all three histories that feature prostitution, but her character undergoes a remarkable metamorphosis. In *Henry IV*, she is presented as a tavern or inn keeper, a profession often used to mask bawdry activities, according to Kelly, Burford, Wotton, and various other historians. Haselkorn identifies her as “a widow who has probably graduated from prostitute to bawd with increasing age and waning charms[,] . . . recognized as acceptable social mobility” (45). However, remarks by Prince Hal and Falstaff reveal that she may still be practicing the trade herself. In Act I, Hal teases Falstaff about his fondness for prostitutes, to which Falstaff replies, “And is not my hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?” (1.2.39-40). The two men then tease each other about frequenting her establishment, and Falstaff reminds the prince that he himself “hast called her to a reckoning many a time and oft” (1.2.48). Falstaff reveals that Prince Hal has frequented the same brothels as Falstaff, including the one run by Mistress Quickly, whose name implies a certain sexual prowess. Here Shakespeare shows that, like the theater, the taverns and bordellos attract men from varying social classes, including nobility.

Later in the play, Falstaff teasingly refers to Mistress Quickly as “sweet queen,” and “good tickle-brain,” revealing a fondness for this easily confused yet loyal woman (2.4.388, 394). In addition to affection, Falstaff’s term of endearment also includes an insult; the term *quean* or *quene* was commonly used to mean “harlot,” a pun also found throughout *Henry VIII* (Rubenstein 209-10). Shakespeare limits Mistress Quickly’s role in this play to a sympathetic one, however, as Falstaff, with his quick wit, easily dupes her out of money owed to her as she justifiably points out to him, “You owe me money,

Sir John, and now you pick a quarrel to beguile me of it. I bought you a dozen shirts to your back” (3.3.66-8). Her comments allude to some economic independence, since her position allows her to loan money to Falstaff. They also hint at the disrespect that society in general held for those who engaged in prostitution or bawdry; Falstaff’s accusations are only possible because he knows that any judge would rule in the favor of a knight before that of a female bawd.

Falstaff proceeds to challenge the Hostess’s integrity by accusing her, “There’s no more faith in thee than in a stewed/ prune, nor no more truth in thee than in a drawn fox;/ and for womanhood, Maid Marian may be the deputy’s/ wife of the ward to thee. Go, you thing, go” (3.3.113-16). This passage reveals more about Falstaff than about Mistress Quickly, since it depicts him as an ungrateful and misogynistic rogue who exploits Mistress Quickly’s body as well as her wallet. Haselkorn makes special note of his reference to her as a “thing,” a word carrying sexual connotations at this time while also demonstrating Falstaff’s attempts to objectify her in order to feel better about exploiting her (46). Only after Prince Hal confesses that he stole Falstaff’s money and ring does Falstaff relent in his verbal attack on her. The construction of this particular scene highlights the vulnerability of those who work outside the boundaries of society; their questionable professions obviously cast doubt upon their integrity, a point that probably would not have garnered much sympathy with Shakespeare’s audience, but one that elicits just such emotion in modern readers. This scene also suggests that the outcasts possess more integrity than the nobles.

Shakespeare continues to present Mistress Quickly as both victim and scapegoat in the *2 Henry IV*, making Mistress Quickly the butt of even more jokes, as she clearly

performs the role of bawd for Falstaff and Doll Tearsheet, a new character who evokes more sympathy than Mistress Quickly. Doll has a relationship with Falstaff that contains real emotion, evident in their playful exchanges, and she exhibits a feistiness usually reserved for the plucky heroines of Shakespeare's comedies. She rebuffs the advances of Pistol, Falstaff's companion who later marries Mistress Quickly, and insults him, calling him a "swaggering rascal," "scurvy companion," and a "cutspur rascal" (2.4.70, 122, 127). According to Doll, Pistol has abused her in the past, "tearing a poor whore's ruff in a bawdy house," and she refuses to do business with him again (2.4.144-5). Doll here refers to herself as a "whore," and, according to Stanton, "[t]his is the *only* instance in Shakespeare's canon of the word's use as spoken by a female character in her own chosen description of herself" (89). Doll makes no apologies for who she is, which challenges the notion that prostitutes, like those who worked in the theater, should feel shame for their chosen profession.

Of all of Shakespeare's prostitutes and the men with whom they are involved, Doll and Falstaff share the closest, healthiest relationship. In Doll's first scene in the play, they banter back and forth over the spread of disease, making light of an otherwise serious subject. Falstaff chides her, "If the cook help to make the gluttony, you/ help make the diseases, Doll. We catch of you, Doll,/ we catch of you. Grant that, my poor virtue, grant that" (2.4.45-7). Doll then responds by pointing out Falstaff's proclivity to steal, charging, "Yea, joy, our chains and our jewels" (2.4.48). She clearly enjoys the bantering jests that they share, and she tells him, "Come, I'll be friends with thee,/ Jack. Thou art going to the wars, and whether I shall/ ever see thee again or no there is nobody cares" (2.4.66-8). Doll addresses Falstaff as Jack, the familiar nickname for John, another

sign that she cares deeply for and enjoys a close relationship with the fat knight, although she reacts stoically to the news that he will leave for war soon, as in her lament that no one cares if they see one another again. Harry Levin calls her statement “a heartcry of loneliness from the stray lives of a prostitute and a soldier of fortune” (13). Because of their lifestyles, emotional bonds are difficult to establish and maintain, but Doll and Falstaff find at least comfort and familiarity, if not love, in each other’s company.

During this scene, Doll and a drunken Pistol heatedly argue over his past mistreatment of her. Falstaff soon tires of Pistol’s insults and defends Doll. The two men fight, which flatters Doll, so she flatters Falstaff in return:

Ah, you sweet little rogue, you! Alas, poor ape,/ how thou sweat’st!
Come, let me wipe thy face. Come/ on, you whoreson chops. Ah, rogue,
I’ faith, I love/ thee. Thou art as valorous as Hector of Troy, worth/ five of
Agamemnon, and ten times better than the Nine Worthies. Ah, villain!
(2.4.214-19)

Doll’s spirited praise of Falstaff demonstrates both respect and true affection for the dissolute, yet engaging rogue, even if it is tempered with affectionate mockery, an always-present component of their relationship. She then promises Falstaff, “I’ll canvas thee between a pair of sheets,” offering him a sexual reward for his defense of her honor (2.4.223).

The entrance of a disguised Prince Hal and Poins interrupts their celebration, and Doll abruptly asks Falstaff “what humor’s the Prince of?” (2.4.235). Whether or not she knows that the tapster is really the Prince remains uncertain, however, and after Falstaff makes disparaging remarks about the two men, Doll and Falstaff resume their flirtatious

dialogue. Falstaff teases her, “Thou dost give me flattering busses,” to which she replies, “By my troth, I kiss thee with a most constant heart” (2.4.268-70). Once Prince Hal un.masks himself, Falstaff, thinking that Doll helped set him up, proceeds to denounce Mistress Quickly and Doll in an effort to save face in front of the Prince. He uses rhetoric that emphasize their lowly status as prostitutes in order to appeal to Prince Hal’s forgiveness; Falstaff explains, “I dispraised him before the wicked, that the/ wicked might not fall in love with thee” (2.4.319-20). He also says of Doll, “she’s in hell already and/ burns poor souls,” insinuating that she will continue to cause others to suffer from venereal disease after her death (2.4.338-9). The women forgive him, however, once Bardolph announces the news of Falstaff’s imminent departure. Doll appears to harbor genuine concern for Falstaff as he prepares to leave; she displays sincere emotion but uses few words to convey them: “I cannot speak. If my heart be not ready to/ burst---well, sweet Jack, have a care of thyself” (2.4.381-2). As noted by Levin earlier, the poignant reality of a soldier and a prostitute emerges again. The moment passes quickly, however, when Bardolph breaks the spell to “Bid Mistress Tearsheet come to my master” (2.4.388-9). As a prostitute summoned by a prince, she cannot afford to remain with Mistress Quickly and lament Falstaff’s departure; she must do as Prince Hal orders, yet Doll “comes blubbered” to the Prince, with her emotions unchecked (2.4.391).

In Part II of *Henry IV*, as in Part I, Falstaff takes advantage of Mistress Quickly and belittles her simultaneously. In Part II, he again insults her by calling her a “queane,” but this time the spelling of the word clearly reveals Falstaff’s slight (2.1.46). There are also two allusions to a broken promise of marriage between Mistress Quickly and Falstaff in the play. In Act 1.2, he orders his page to deliver a letter to “Old Mistress/ Ursula,

whom I have weekly sworn to marry/ since I perceived the first white hair of my chin” (1.2.239-41). Bevington speculates that Ursula is either Mistress Quickly’s first name mistakenly unchanged from an earlier draft of the play or the name of another woman that Falstaff has deceived for an extended period of time (fn. 240). Later, in Act 2.1, Mistress Quickly attempts to have Falstaff arrested for non-payment of a debt, charging that “when the Prince broke thy head for/ liking his father to a singing-man of Windsor, thou/ didst swear to me then, as I was washing they wound,/ to marry me and me my lady thy wife” (2.1.87-90). She clearly harbors resentment over his failure to marry her, since such a marriage would elevate her status in society. Additionally, Mistress Quickly obviously has affectionate feelings for Falstaff since she has waited for so long to marry him, despite his repeated attempts to exploit her financially. Shakespeare subtly arouses sympathy in the audience by highlighting Mistress Quickly’s vulnerability and contrasting it with Falstaff’s indifference. While on the surface the situation seems comical, this humorous facade hides the sadness of a woman who has failed to attain her desire.

Later in the play, shortly after Prince Hal becomes King Henry V, Mistress Quickly and Doll are arrested and ordered to be whipped. Stanton posits that the two women are being punished solely for their position as prostitutes, since the officer arrests them because of their association with Pistol, whose uncontrolled temper has resulted in a man’s death; the two women “are being used as convenient scapegoats[, and] Pistol, named as the guilty one, is free” (Stanton 89). As they are being dragged away by the officers, Doll announces her pregnancy and warns the officers, “Come on, I’ll tell thee/ what, thou damned tripe-visaged rascal, an the child I go with do miscarry, thou wert

better thou hadst struck thy mother” (5.4.7-10). Mistress Quickly reveals that Falstaff is the child’s father, which further complicates her relationship with the unfaithful knight, and her jealousy emerges as she curses Doll, “I/ pray God the fruit of her womb miscarry!” (5.4.12-3). Doll’s pleas fail to sway the officers to leniency, however, and both she and Mistress Quickly are removed to prison. Despite Falstaff’s vow to “deliver” Doll, no action appears to be made to rescue her from punishment (5.5.38). Falstaff neither frees her, nor does he facilitate the birth of their child, since the new King promptly banishes him, and the Epilogue informs us that Falstaff will shortly “die of the sweat,” alluding to venereal disease or some other malady (28). We must assume that Doll indeed miscarries since no other mention of the child appears in this play or its sequel.

In the next play, *Henry V*, which resumes shortly after the conclusion of *Henry IV* 2, prostitution functions minimally, almost as a footnote to the previous play. Doll, we learn from one of Pistol’s insults, has retreated to a “spital” to lie in a “powdering tub of infamy” to receive treatment for venereal disease (2.1.75-6). Shortly after, Pistol reveals, “Falstaff he is dead” (2.3.5). In a singularly moving speech, Mistress Quickly recounts Falstaff’s death, including Theobald’s famous emendation, “and ‘a babbled of green fields”” (2.3.9-25). Discussing Falstaff’s death, Mistress Quickly agrees that he may have spoken disparagingly of wine, but she refuses to believe that he would repent his former lifestyle and decry women since he loved their company so much; such a statement does seem out of character for Falstaff, and if accurate would also renounce his lengthy relationship with Mistress Quickly. Rather, she declares that now “[h]e’s in Arthur’s/ bosom,” and her speech is at once tender and full of the malapropisms for which she is

known; she then bids him a final “Farewell! Adieu!” (2.3.9-10, 61). Doll and Falstaff share a similar fate, although it is obviously not the one for which either of them had hoped. Their deaths, rather than appearing to be justified because of their lifestyles, arouse sympathy in the audience, particularly because of the liveliness and wit of the two characters. Their magnetism allows the audience to empathize with them while they are alive and mourn them when they are dead. Falstaff’s friends grieve at his passing, as well, especially Mistress Quickly, who laments, “The King has killed his heart” (2.1.88). As the group prepares to attend to Falstaff as he lies on his deathbed, even Pistol, who has fought with Falstaff in the past, expresses the desire to ease his suffering, stating, “Let us condole the knight” (2.1.127). Despite their differences, the remaining members of this group of outcasts decide to honor Falstaff in his last hours. The loyalty that the “lowlife” frequenters of Eastchapel feel for each other also arouses a feeling of sympathy from the audience.

At the beginning of *Henry V*, we learn that Mistress Quickly has experienced profound changes in life. She and the hot-tempered Pistol have wed, which illustrates how society would allow a man to redeem a prostitute through marriage, thus legitimizing her and finally controlling her sexuality. Both Mistress Quickly and Pistol are now concerned with appearing respectable. When Nym, another of Falstaff’s tavern mates, refers to Pistol as “Host,” another moniker for a brothel-keeper, Pistol adamantly proclaims, “I swear, I scorn the term! Nor shall my Nell keep lodgers” (2.1.30-1). Pistol and his new wife seek legitimacy now that they are married, and they attempt to distance themselves from their former lives. They ultimately fail, however, since Mistress Quickly dies “I’th’ spital of a malady of France” (5.1.81). Only Pistol mourns for her, and her

death leaves him bitter and angry. Distraught over the loss of his wife, he vows, “Well, bawd I’ll turn,” perhaps seeking to maintain a link with her by entering her former profession (5.1.84).

In *Othello*, Shakespeare designates Bianca as a courtesan in his *dramatis personae*, yet she has a larger role than the courtesan in *Comedy of Errors*. She functions primarily to further the plot, but her minor yet necessary presence evokes perhaps the greatest sympathy of all of Shakespeare’s prostitutes. Eamon Grennan observes, “As a woman conventionally scorned, desired, used, and abused, she underlines the theme of female abuse at the heart of the play” (282). Grennan views Bianca as a “passionate, spontaneous, and honest human being,” one who speaks her mind and never betrays her own emotions, which Iago will eventually exploit to further his machinations (282-283). Bianca carries on a long affair with Cassio, but her vulnerability as a courtesan emerges towards the end of the play when Iago accuses her of instigating the attack on Cassio. However, when she first appears on stage, in Act 3, Scene 4, Cassio addresses her in affectionate terms, calling her “my most fair Bianca,” “sweet love,” and “Sweet Bianca” (3.4.170, 172, 180). He clearly has affection for her, and she reciprocates his affection openly and enthusiastically, thereby establishing a relationship similar to that of Doll and Falstaff. Nina Rulon-Miller argues that Bianca and Cassio have a more permanent relationship than a courtesan and her customer would imply, positing instead that the two should more accurately be described as lovers (101). Bianca takes the liberty of chastising Cassio for staying away from her for so long, playfully scolding him, “What, keep a week away? Seven days and nights?/ Eightscore-eight hours? And lovers’ absent hours/ more tedious than the dial eightscore times?/ Oh, weary reck’ning!” (3.4.174-177).

Their relationship appears to extend beyond a sexual bond to one of genuine affection, perhaps even love, challenging the traditional portrayals of prostitutes. Bianca even exhibits jealousy when Cassio presents her with Desdemona's handkerchief and asks her to make a copy of it. She rebukes him, and he truthfully replies, "You are jealous now/ that this is from some mistress, some remembrance./ No, by my faith, Bianca" (3.4.187-189). He shows concern for how Bianca feels; more specifically, he worries that she may think he has been unfaithful, which is remarkable for a companion of her position to expect from a man of his status.

However, Cassio also exhibits society's preoccupation with the "Madonna/whore" dichotomy that causes the other male characters in the play to suffer. In Act 4, Scene 1, Iago encourages Cassio to make ribald jokes about Bianca, while Othello, eavesdropping, believes that the jokes are aimed at his wife, Desdemona. Iago tells Cassio that Bianca "gives it out that you [Cassio] shall marry her," (4.1.118), to which Cassio, perhaps somewhat ashamed of his affection for Bianca and wanting to look like a lady-killer in the eyes of Iago, derisively replies, "I marry her? What? A customer? Prithce, bear/ some charity to my wit; do not think it so unwhole-/ some. Ha, ha, ha" (4.1.122-24). His use of the word *customer* exposes the economic aspect of their relationship, and it taints any hope that Bianca has of marrying him. Clearly, Cassio does not desire to marry her, even though he harbors affectionate feelings for her; he does not see her as a potential wife because of her profession, preferring instead to marry someone like Desdemona, the virtuous wife of Othello and a woman whom he can place on a pedestal. Carol Thomas Neely insists that "play's humanization of her . . . underlines the folly of the male characters who see her as merely whore" (140). Shakespeare elicits

great sympathy for Bianca by emphasizing her precarious position in society. Cassio speaks dismissively of Bianca, demeaning her: "'Tis such another fitchew! Marry, a perfumed/ one" (4.1.148-49), but then he agrees to see her that night for dinner. Bianca functions as a pleasant distraction for Cassio, but as her hopes for marriage to Cassio illustrate, to Bianca he represents a chance to escape from her lifestyle by marrying a respected man of society. Bianca exhibits the desire to abandon her profession as a courtesan and establish a respectable life with Cassio, actions which would have been encouraged by the Puritans since Bianca would attain Christian redemption in such a marriage. The audience feels sympathy for Bianca because she fails to attain this goal and transcend her status as a whore, especially since "Bianca, because she does not see herself as a whore in her relationship with Cassio, is surprised when he treats her like one" (Neely 148).

Later, during the fight scene of Act 5, Scene 1, Roderigo wounds Cassio as directed by Iago. A crowd gathers, and Bianca enters, having "brave[d] the confusion of the night and the ugliness of Iago's insinuations to Cassio's side when he is wounded" (Neely 145); as soon as she realizes that Cassio has been seriously hurt, she cries out, "Oh, my dear Cassio!/ My sweet Cassio! Oh, Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!" (5.1.77-78), obviously distraught because of his injuries. Seeing an opportunity to frame Bianca for Cassio's injuries because her reputation as a prostitute automatically places her in a suspicious position, Iago immediately calls her a "notable strumpet," (5.1.79) and then accuses her outright: "Gentleman, I do suspect this trash/ to be a party in this injury" (5.1.86-87). Iago continues to implicate Bianca in the crime, asking her, "Look you pale, mistress?" and querying the men standing nearby, "Do you perceive the gastness of her

eye?” (5.1.107-8). Bianca suffers from the “fruits of whoring,” and cannot defend herself because “guiltiness /will speak, though tongues were out of use” (5.1.118; 110-12).

Haselkorn explains that “prostitutes are society’s scapegoats, whose persecution is justified by rhetoric. Society first subjugates them and then cites their oppressed status as proof of their inferiority” (19). Bianca tries to defend herself after Emilia joins the other accusers, replying, “I am no strumpet, but of life as honest/ as you that thus abuses me” (5.1.124-5). Unfortunately, her reputation prevents her from seeming innocent of the crime because her profession sullies her name, although ironically, Cassio’s association with a prostitute does not sully his name and he remains “good Cassio” despite his illicit relationship with Bianca. Thus the play highlights the double standard whereby the patriarchal discourse allows for male indiscretions, but condemns the women with whom they commit these indiscretions. Despite any prejudices held against prostitutes, the sight of an innocent woman being led to jail would inspire pity in any audience in any time period, adding to the tragedy of the play.

Just prior to the scene in which Bianca is taken to jail, falsely accused of Cassio’s attack, Othello finally confronts Desdemona in Act IV Scene 2, referred to as the “brothel scene.” In this scene, Othello seeks confirmation of his suspicions of infidelity from Desdemona and Emilia. The scene stresses the abuse of women and the scorn with which prostitutes and adulterous women, either actual or suspected, were treated. In this scene, Othello calls Emilia “a simple bawd” as he sends her to “procure” Desdemona for him (4.2.21). As Emilia leaves Othello and Desdemona alone to talk, Othello again treats her like a bawd, bidding her to “leave procreants alone” and stand outside of the door and to “cough or cry ‘hem’ if anybody come,” clearly referring to the actions that a bawd would

take after arranging for a whore to meet her customer (4.2.30-1). He also refers to Desdemona as “a subtle whore,” illustrating the misogyny of a culture that both profited from and was repulsed by prostitution; the label “whore” is the most slanderous insult that Othello can use to express his rage at a wife who may have strayed.

In her essay, “Why Should He Call Her Whore?” Lisa Jardine perceptively observes that “[i]t does not just matter *that* a woman is called a ‘whore’, it matters *when* and *where* she is [called a whore],” making a distinction between the “utterance (text) and occasion (...event)” (21). Jardine also discusses agency in *Othello*, specifically Desdemona and her status as an object rather than a subject (20). She asserts:

All three [women] are wrongfully accused of sexual misdemeanour in this in the course of the play; all three, though unequal in their rank-power, are equally vulnerable to a *sexual* charge brought against them: although the incidents which provoke the slander may be presumed to be of separate and distinct types (as befits the differing social situations in which the three women find themselves), they yield the identical slur, the identical charge of sexual promiscuity—the most readily available form of assault on a woman’s reputation. Each takes the accusation (once made) extremely seriously; but the ways these accusations are dealt with by the women themselves have very different consequences, and this is crucial, I shall argue, for a ‘historical’ understanding of the outcome of the plot. (25).

Jardine continues to discuss the similarities between Bianca and Desdemona, noting that they are:

both women of independent spirit (and means), both Venetian women of some rank and status, both accused of being ‘whores of Venice’, when Venetian whores were a recognizable *topos* of literature and art, both associated negatively with Cassio’s Florentine manners and ‘proper manhood’. Textually a critic might note their ‘equivalence’; but there are considerable consequences to their occupying entirely different rank positions in the community, with differing sets of social relations. (30)

Both Bianca and Desdemona suffer after being accused of prostitution; Bianca loses her freedom, while Desdemona loses her life. Additionally, many feminist critics encourage readers to

resist the urge to defend or sanctify them [the female characters in *Othello*], [so that] we can read these women more realistically: Bianca is a passionate woman who is hopelessly in love with a man who exploits her; Emilia is a woman co-opted into patriarchy who will betray her beloved mistress to please her husband and jump at the chance to demean a lower-class woman; and Desdemona is a sensual, desiring woman who enjoys an occasional flirtatious badinage. (Rulon-Miller 110)

However, despite more recent feminist readings of the play, the fates of these characters continue to highlight the premium placed upon chastity by English society and the vulnerability faced by women who either failed or appeared to fail to maintain their chastity.

Shakespeare uses prostitution to comment on the darker side of humanity in another tragedy that features prostitutes, *Timon of Athens*. In this play, which Bevington

accurately describes as “Shakespeare’s most relentless study in misanthropy,” a nobleman, Timon, loses everything he owns due to his excessive generosity, and after he is deserted by all of those whom he helped he retreats to the wilderness outside of town to live in exile (1293). During his time in the woods outside of town, Timon comes to realize that the only person who has been faithful and honest with him is Flavius, his former servant and the only character to escape Timon’s bitter denunciation of humankind. Timon eventually dies alone, still in exile, but Alcibiades eulogizes him as an admirable man.

After Timon has found the hidden gold in the forest shortly after arriving in exile, he sits and contemplates the greed and other vices of many of his fellow citizens. The soldier Alcibiades then appears accompanied by two prostitutes, Phrynia and Timandra, prompting Timon to make a passionate speech on the nature of lust. It is worth pointing out that these are the only two female characters in the entire play, and their status as prostitutes could be interpreted as a pessimistic statement on both womankind and the nature of greed since these two women sell their affections for money, implying that nothing in life remains sacred or untouched by greed. Gordon Williams observes, “Women have a minimal part in *Timon*, which helps to register their Act IV appearance as a kind of counterpart to that ‘*masque of Ladies as Amazons*’ which has entertained Timon and his dinner company in Act I” (130). In his soliloquy just before these three arrive, Timon curses the gold that he has found by calling it “damned earth, thou common whore of mankind, that puts odds among the rout of nations” (4.3.42-44.) Timon clearly conflates the avarice that has driven him from society with the lust that motivates prostitution, resulting in a single source of all of the evil in the world, which is

an especially powerful rhetorical device for a seventeenth-century culture still smarting from the growing pains of a new capitalist economy. As Rolf Soellner explains:

The static medieval society with its conception of a 'just price' and clearly definable status of persons was being replaced by a modern market society that permitted and encouraged a possessive individualism. The motivating force of men's behavior was no longer the love of God (or the fear of hell, as some would say), but expediency and utility, and the most desired goal was material success. (116)

Timon seems particularly troubled that the love of money had replaced the love of fellow human beings, as his metaphorical merging of prostitution and greed illustrates.

In his diatribe against Phrynia and Timandra, Timon curses humankind, and his speech is replete with references to destruction, rot, and disease. Timon commands the women, "Be a whore still. They love thee not that use thee. Give them diseases, leaving with thee their lust" (4.3). Timon stresses to the women that the men who use their services do not love them, which reminds the women of the sadness resulting from their acts of loveless sex, a relatively new concept related to the Puritan concept of married love (Haselkorn 17). He also bitterly blames them for spreading disease, a common charge made by many in their arguments against both prostitution and the theater, and Timon "presents prostitution as being . . . a leveller of society" (Nowottny 495).

Williams also reminds us, "[t]he link between Cupid and Death, if not between Cupid and the dissemination of pox, is an ancient one. [Edgar] Wind notes how 'The Renaissance identified him with Death itself, in its painful no less than its joyous aspect'" (131).

Timon's speech directs them to "burn . . . up . . . he whose pious breath seeks to

convert” them (4.3.143-4). By this point in the play, Timon desires to see society collapse, as he also urges Alcibiades to slaughter every living soul in Athens, and Timon recognizes that such an opportunity exists because of the weakness of male lust since prostitution offers the chance for more citizens to be destroyed through disease, reinforcing his jaundiced view of the world. Timon “plans nothing less than to launch the two whores into Athens as weapons of germ warfare” (Williams 132). However, we should remember that Timon does not necessarily represent the views of his creator; Timon speaks from a misanthropic position, criticizing every human being in Athens, even “the babe, whose dimpled smiles from fools exhaust their mercy,” so it becomes difficult to interpret his speech as anything other than the vitriolic rantings of a bitter man (4.3.84-5).

Williams also points out that, despite the “monstrous” aspect of Timon’s plan, it would not have been unfamiliar to Shakespeare’s audience; popular versions of just such acts had been appearing since 1495 (133-4). Despite Timon’s bitter admonition to Phrynia and Timandra to spread disease, they continually beg him for more gold. In this scene, the prostitutes become symbols for human greed, but this representation fails to take into account the fact that many women turned to this profession for survival, especially since economic opportunities were limited to domestic employment and textile work, with the majority of other professions restricted to men only (Haselkorn 13). Haselkorn describes an obscure statute enacted early in Elizabeth’s reign that “stated that unmarried, unemployed women between the ages of twelve and forty were subject to forced labor,” which could last anywhere from one day to one year; Haselkorn thus argues that working in a brothel offered an appealing alternative to this forced labor and

to the poverty of unemployment. In *Timon*, however, it seems that Shakespeare condemns prostitution as a symptom of a morally debased society, rather than condemning it in and of itself. The play decries how easily friendship can be bought, so naturally it condemns love that can also be easily bought. The play censures all false friends and lovers, rather than indentifying the act of prostitution as the source of evil in society.

Shakespeare's last play to deal with prostitution offers an example of a redemptive "whore" in Marina, who challenges the popular Renaissance belief of the whore as a necessary, albeit corruptive force in society, thereby defying dominant ideology in an interesting way. Although Marina remains confined in a brothel for much of the play, she refrains from selling her body or favors for money; rather, she converts everyone she meets from prostitution. In the beginning of the play, Marina, a young, beautiful pious maiden, evokes sympathy in the audience because she has been sold into slavery and left without male protection. Marina, the daughter of an absent prince and a mother presumed dead, eventually finds herself confined in a brothel run by Pander and his wife Bawd. The two bawds purchase Marina from pirates at the markets of Mytilene, much as they would purchase any other goods. They instruct Bolt to "take you the marks of her, the color of her/ hair, complexion, height, her age, with warrant of her/ virginity, and cry, 'He that will give the most shall have/ her first.'" Such a maidenhead were no cheap thing" (4.2.55-9). This assessment reduces Marina to a commodity, with her virginity valued not for marriage, but for sale to the highest bidder. The threat of sexual danger to Marina mirrors the same dangers faced by other girls and women who found their way into brothels, especially those who were born into the profession because their

mothers worked as prostitutes. Although rape itself was recognized as a crime, the rape of a prostitute was not (Karras *Common* 34). Additionally, Marina's purchase in a free market indicates that the supply of prostitutes did not meet the demand, and Karras describes how the stews of Southward, which regularly ran out of prostitutes, replenished their supply. Haselkorn notes, "The short supply of 'fresh' prostitutes was undoubtedly a common problem for bawds since both Ursula in *Bartholomew Fair* and the bawd in *Pericles* have the same concern" (51). Bawds often resorted to tricking or forcing young women into prostitution, "particularly domestic servants with no families of their own in the towns where they worked" (57). Court cases exist that show how these women were often raped, then presumed to be a prostitute because of the situation in which the crime occurred (Karras *Common* 58). Marina's plight draws attention to this very real situation and elicits strong compassion in the audience.

Despite their best efforts to corrupt her, Marina rises above her situation and maintains her chastity, even inspiring others to relinquish their lustful ways in favor of a more virtuous life. Her piety prevents her from blaming the gods for her fate. When Bawd tells her that "the gods have done their part in you," she replies, "I accuse them not" (4.2.68-70), swearing, "If fires be hot, knives sharp, or waters deep/ Untied I still my virgin know will keep./ Diana aid my purpose!" (4.2.146-48); she remains the model of virtue even while surrounded by those who embrace vice. Shakespeare's decision to introduce Marina in this particular situation results in more sympathy for her than if she had come to work in the whorehouse of her own free will, which is how most women ended up in the profession. Karras suggests that late medieval audiences saw prostitutes as "both subject and object, agent and victim," and Marina certainly challenges this

viewpoint (*Common* 48). Agency would indicate that she chose to be a part of this environment, and since she was sold into slavery, agency is effectively removed. This minor plot device eliminates the “‘happy hooker’ model” from consideration, leaving only the “‘white slave’ model” for audiences to pity (Karras *Common* 48).

Marina’s virginity soon attracts potential buyers, including Lysimachus, the governor of Tarsus. She eloquently persuades him to harness his desires, beseeching him, “If you were born to honor, show it now” (4.6.93). The threat of violence against her is temporarily removed, but she remains in a vulnerable position, which evokes both sympathy and anxiety in the audience, especially since Bolt, Pander’s servant, later attempts to rape her because he “fears that Marina’s invincible chastity is bad for business and will drive away their” customers (Haselkorn 52). She again employs her piety and eloquence to persuade him to aid her, giving him gold and extracting a promise from him to help her escape her situation. Lorraine Helms points out that Marina in *Pericles* differs from the Prostitute Priestess of Shakespeare’s sources who defends herself against would-be attackers with their own weapons; instead, “eloquence preserves her [Marina’s] chastity without bloodshed” (329). Marina thus subverts expectations by exploiting her rhetorical skills to persuade would-be sinners to avoid sin, reversing the common early Renaissance belief that prostitutes entice otherwise pious men to sin.

The bawds in this play are particularly determined to corrupt Marina, which seems to reinforce the common contemporary perception that those involved in the trade of prostitution tried to entice innocent persons to sin. Since Marina is a high-born woman, however, she defies the situation and remains virtuous. I assert that this reflects Shakespeare’s sensitivity to rigid class structure more than his comment upon the nature

of corruption. However, unlike the other bawds in Shakespeare's plays, Pander and Bawd possess no redeeming character traits. Placing Marina in such a degrading environment only serves to highlight her virtue; thus, the lack of positive attributes in the brothel characters cannot be interpreted as an indictment of the entire institution of prostitution, just as the weaknesses of individual characters such as Richard III and Macbeth cannot be interpreted as an argument for the dissolution of the monarchy.

One particularly distinctive aspect of this play is its portrayal of the male characters that frequent the brothel. After Marina successfully persuades Lysimachus to abstain from sex with her or any other woman in the brothel, he shows remorse and repents his former choices. Haselkorn asserts that "[a]s long as an untouched maiden (particularly one with persuasive powers and of a noble birth) retains her innocence and does not fall, the Cavalier dramatist endorses her power for good; i.e. the ability to turn men away from temptation and sin, which Marina apparently does" (53). As Marina reveals her story, Lysimachus offers her gold and utters, "A curse upon him, die like a thief,/ That robs thee of thy goodness!" (4.6.116-7). He has clearly changed his views about prostitution, and he no longer wants to be associated with it; instead he seeks redemption, a plot development which aligns him more closely with the Puritan attitude as defined by Haselkorn. By admitting guilt, Lysimachus renounces the double standard by which women were punished for their role in prostitution, while men escaped with their reputations intact. As we see in *Othello*, as well as in the research by Ungerer, Helmholz, and others, the men who frequented brothels never suffered any consequences; Lysimachus's actions, as well as those of Bolt, reveal that he knew that he had engaged in improper and immoral behavior. This acceptance subtly indicts society's double standard

by showing that the male “customer” shared guilt equally with the female “prostitute.”

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Throughout his works, Shakespeare offers various portrayals of prostitutes, ranging from the humorous *Mistresses Quickly* and *Overdone* to the sympathetic Bianca to the admirable Marina, who, although she lives in a brothel is not really a prostitute. The common thread uniting his attitude toward all of these figures is a lack of condemnation; even in *Timon*, which offers the bleakest of view on the subject, prostitution appears as a symptom of human greed and insincere affection, rather than a source of the disease. Shakespeare deliberately avoids outright denunciation of prostitutes, instead focusing on the hypocritical attitude of a society that demonized prostitution even as it profited from it. His brothels bear little resemblance to the schools of abuse of which anti-theatrical critics like Gosson and Stubbes warned society. His prostitutes are not evil temptresses who lure men off of the streets; instead, they mirror the prostitutes of Karras's history: women who struggled for survival in an unfriendly economic and social environment. They represent the real-life Dolls and Biancas who peopled the district shared by brothels and theaters, the lively audience members who cheered his works, and the scapegoats who, like those employed in the theater, were easy targets for moralists in a flawed society. Their stories, generally ignored by history, are dramatized in the plays of Shakespeare. Their sad fates draw attention to the hypocrisy of

Tudor-Stuart society, which simultaneously required and rejected prostitutes.

Shakespeare, with grace and subtlety, ensured that the voices of these women would be heard.

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