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Elite Female Servants in Early Modern English Drama: Gender, Race, and Status in Service

Leiner, Rebecca

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**Elite Female Servants in Early Modern English Drama: Gender,
Race, and Status in Service**

Rebecca Leiner

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King's College London

Department of English

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Abstract

This thesis attends to the figure of the elite female servant in early modern English drama (1590-1625). There has been a critical tendency to homogenise female servant characters as lower status, and as a result the complexity of their social position within the household has not always been fully understood. In this thesis, I recognise the elite status of many female servant characters, analysing them through the broader frameworks of early modern service and social status. In doing so, I offer fresh readings of a range of both canonical and non-canonical plays, as well as new insights into the ways in which playwrights dramatised identities shaped not only by status, but also by time, gender, and race.

Chapter One analyses the temporal concept of ‘waiting’ in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Henry VIII* and Fletcher’s *A Wife for a Month* to examine the specific relationship elite female servants have with time, and the ways in which waiting in service can both hinder and enable these characters to construct their futures. Chapter Two considers the elite female servants in Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling* and Shakespeare’s *All’s Well that Ends Well* to explore how status, sexuality, and the economy intersect through these characters. Chapter Three develops this intersectional approach to analyse the interplay of race, gender, and status as represented by the figure of the elite Black female servant in John Webster’s *The White Devil*, John Fletcher’s *The Knight of Malta*, and William Percy’s forgotten manuscript, *A Forrest Tragedye in Vacunium*. Chapter Four brings two of Shakespeare’s anomalous elite female servant characters, Emilia in *Othello* and Paulina in *The Winter’s Tale*, into critical dialogue to demonstrate how paying attention to the nuances of status and of service can dramatically reshape how we read and perform these characters, as well as how we understand the drama and culture of the early modern period.

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Notes on the Texts

Unless otherwise stated, all references to William Shakespeare's plays are from The Arden Shakespeare Third Edition. All references to John Fletcher's works are to Fredson Bowers' edition of *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*. All references to pre-1800 texts are to Early English Books Online. After the first footnote to a given work, all subsequent references to that work are incorporated in parentheses in the body of the text. I give the Harbage limits for date of first performance in brackets. In the body of the thesis, I use an abbreviated version of the full title of a text. I retain original spelling and punctuation when quoting from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources and manuscripts, both in the body of the text, in the footnotes and in the bibliography. However, I replace the long 's' and substitute 'w' for double 'v' throughout.

Introduction

‘Of the chief conditions and qualitiyes in a waiting gentywoman.

1. To be well born and of a good house’

Baldassare Castiglione, *The Courtier*

‘The blood that streams through her veines was nobly Derived’

Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentlewoman*

‘Waiting women, and such like, being borne of gentlemen...’

William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*¹

Early modern English domestic manuals rarely discuss female servants who hold the elite title of ‘waiting woman’, ‘waiting gentlewoman’, or ‘maid of honour’, focusing instead on ‘lower ranking’ servants such as maidservants and chambermaids.² However, when women with these elite titles are described, writers emphasise their good birth, noting their ascribed status to be of the gentry or nobility. As the quotations above show, a serving woman’s social status determined her household position. These women – commonly understood to be young, socially elite, and unmarried – served in households of either equivalent or superior social ranking to their own. Rather than performing domestic household service as would a chambermaid or maidservant, women who were described as ‘lower ranking’, an elite female servant was in service for a wifely education.³ Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford observe that ‘[e]ven the nobility had an equivalent for service: aristocratic daughters acquired skills in housewifery and deportment while living in the homes of well-connected kinswomen’.⁴ However, as this thesis will demonstrate, these women were not in an ‘equivalent’ to service, but were *in* service. Rather than

¹ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Courtier* (London, 1561), Zz3r; Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentlewoman* (London, 1631), Qq2r; William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), Qq5r.

² See Hannah Woolley for a categorisation of domestic female service and how these women are described as ‘lower ranking’. Hannah Woolley, *The Complete Servant Maid* (London, 1670), D6v.

³ Woolley, D6v.

⁴ Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England: 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 94.

attending to the household's domestic needs, elite female servants directly served their mistress's personal needs, learning both how to serve and how to be a mistress.

The figure of the elite female servant is often present in the writing of Shakespeare and his contemporaries and plays an important role in the shaping of a narrative. Although critics have attended to the study of service and to the portrayal of working women in early modern drama, a comprehensive study of elite female service has not yet emerged. In this thesis, I examine the portrayal of elite women in service in early modern English drama, women who hold an elite status in society but whose household position subjugates them into a subordinate role in a variety of ways. It is important to understand the hierarchies and intricacies of elite female servants, which are often misunderstood and marginalised, since rethinking their ancillary position in early modern terms presents us with new insights into a considerable range of plays from the period, not least those of Shakespeare. This thesis argues that examining the elite female servant as a site for the intersection of status with temporality, sexuality, race, and gender is vital if we are to further develop our understanding of the institution of service in early modern culture, and therefore transform our reading of the early modern dramatic canon.

This introduction sets up the framework for this thesis by addressing a number of questions and concerns about the portrayal of female service in early modern drama, and it makes a claim for the ways in which criticism and performances have (mis)understood service identities. Female servants of diverse social classes, of different races, and of varying ages have tended to be grouped together by scholars, their heterogeneity left unstudied, and it is this tendency that I seek to redress. In the first section of this introduction, I will establish the critical field of work which has examined service in early modern drama. Studies produced by literary scholars have increasingly drawn attention to the centrality of service in the household, political

state, and general society, as well as to the menial position of servants. What will become clear is how seemingly absent female servants are from the study of service in early modern drama and how the importance of social status to the institution of service is largely missing to date. In this section, I chart the progression of the field of service so we may understand how it has expanded in recent years to reclaim perspectives and studies of non-white, non-male servant characters that have historically been ignored.

Whereas critics focusing specifically on service in early modern literature have not yet recognised the nuanced stratifications of female service nor considered what was expected of elite female servants during this liminal period in their lives between childhood and marriage, some scholars have identified these distinctions. In the second section, I then turn my attention to exploring what I have defined as the “service life cycle”, as I investigate how one entered elite female service, what was expected during the service period, and how service concluded. Drawing upon important work by Laura Gowing, Sarah Mendelson, Patricia Crawford, Eleanor Hubbard, Clare McManus, Nadine Akkerman and Birgit Houben, all of whom contribute to the study of female servants in the early modern period, I scrutinise the progression of the “service life cycle”. Doing so highlights how the ideal, linear nature of service is, in fact, unstable. I suggest that it is the tension created by the uncertainty and instability of this social position, alongside ideologies of gender within the household, which makes for good drama. Understanding the historical experience of early modern elite female service lends itself to a more comprehensive reading of elite female servants in the literature of the period.

Having established a foundation for understanding the expectations and “service life cycle” of elite female service, I set out my terminology and methodology for analysing this form of service and its stratifications in early modern drama. The titles assigned to elite female

servants are valuable to our understanding of these characters as they signify clear social and economic differences which would have perhaps been obvious to an early modern reader or playgoer. As I examine the terminology and elite female servant positions – specifically the roles of maid of honour, waiting gentlewoman, and waiting woman – I illustrate the nuanced stratifications of elite female service and how we see these characterisations unfold in early modern drama. One of the key focal points of this thesis is the status of women in service and how status shapes the construction of a female servant’s identity. I notably do not use the term “class” to describe hierarchical social groupings, as this is an early-nineteenth century term which reflects the divisions of an industrial, capitalist society and is a term which does not distinguish or consider ascribed status, i.e., the status one was assigned at birth. Of course, many plays do not specify the exact title of a woman in service, and therefore, in this section, I explain my methodology for determining who we should and should not classify as an elite female servant. Finally, in the last section of this introduction, I outline the structure and content of the four chapters of this thesis.

Critical Approaches: Service Studies

The study of service in early modern drama emerged in the late 1990s as a result of historians making a concerted effort to pen ‘history from below’ by exploring the lives of servants and the non-elite in early modern England.⁵ Although the institution of service was seemingly absent from most twentieth-century criticism of early modern drama, it evolved as part of the New Historicist and Cultural Materialism shift in the later twentieth century.⁶ In recent years, the

⁵ This phrase was popularised by E.P. Thompson in his article ‘History from Below’ in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 3345 (7th April, 1966), pp. 279-80.

⁶ In 1958, Jonas Barish and Marshall Waingrow’s article in *Shakespeare Quarterly* examined the presence of service in *King Lear*, and Richard Strier’s 1988 chapter in *The Historical Renaissance* explored disobedience in service in *King Lear*. Jonas Barish and Marshall Waingrow, “‘Service’ in *King Lear*” in *Shakespeare Quarterly* V. 9, Summer

study of service has intersected with critical race studies and feminist criticism to broaden its focus, giving attention to non-white and non-male servant characters, to recuperate perspectives that have historically been elided.

In order to understand the progression of the field, it is necessary to consider the two ‘pioneering studies’ of service in early modern drama: Mark Thornton Burnett’s *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (1997) and Michael Neill’s *Putting History to the Question* (2000).⁷ In the first book-length study of service in early modern literature and culture, Burnett surveys a range of early modern literature to probe how anxieties provoked by issues of socio-economic status and the destabilisation of the social hierarchy shaped and were shaped by the representations of servant characters. In each of his five chapters – dedicated to the study of apprenticeships, crafts and trade, the male domestic servant, the female servant, and the noble household – Burnett considers ‘the changes that were challenging the contemporary order’ and how servants incite anxieties ‘of political instability, disorder and social frustration and unrest’.⁸ His chapter on female servants in early modern drama is significant, particularly to the arguments of this thesis, as he notably differentiates between constructions of women in service ‘from above’ (i.e., elite service) and those in service ‘below’ (domestic service).⁹ Although Burnett’s attention is not directed towards the status of women in service, his focus on their household position suggests that female servants held an

1958, pp. 347-355; Richard Strier, ‘Faithful Servants: Shakespeare’s Praise of Disobedience’ in *The Historical Renaissance*, eds. Richard Strier and Heather Dubrow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) pp. 104-33. For further detail on these articles and brief mentions of early service scholarship, see David Evett, ‘The Year’s Work in Service Studies: Shakespeare, 2005’ in *Modern Philology* 104, no. 3 (2007), pp. 412–29.

⁷ Elizabeth Rivlin, ‘Service and Servants in Early Modern English Culture to 1660’ in *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 4 (2015), pp. 17-41, p. 21.

⁸ Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (London, New York: Macmillan Press Limited, 1997), p. 5.

⁹ Burnett, p. 128.

ambiguous and conflicting role. Drawing on important archival work by Laura Gowing and Frances Dolan, Burnett describes how early modern literature imagines female servants as ‘domestic dangers’: women who had the potential to incite household and social disorder but were nevertheless vulnerable to abuse.¹⁰

Burnett highlights ‘two dominant features’ which he argues are crucially linked in the presentation of the female servant on the early modern English stage: the consistent association of these characters ‘with a menial social place’ and the presentation of them in connection with an ‘all-consuming sexuality’.¹¹ In this thesis, I develop this line of critical analysis to argue, firstly, that being of a lower social position – as a waiting gentlewoman would be to her mistress – does not indicate that these women hold a low social status as would a middling or lower ranking servant. I propose that we must think of status relationships within elite households relatively, as I will discuss in Chapter Two’s analysis of Shakespeare’s *All’s Well That Ends Well*. Secondly, I contend that imagining female servants ‘in terms of an all-consuming sexuality’ is an over-generalisation of these characters. This approach fundamentally misrepresents their actions in these plays, ignoring, for instance, how elite female servants seek out social mobility and marriage to conclude their time in service. Burnett’s study of female servants is the first of its kind and lays the groundwork for the field, as he considers service and servant characters across a range of early modern texts; however, I caution against his reading of social status and sexuality in service, as it not only hyper-sexualises these characters but also has the potential to undermine the agency and authority they possess.

¹⁰ Burnett, p. 120.

¹¹ Burnett, p. 129.

Both Burnett and Neill share a view of servants as oppressed, marginal characters who were central to and reflective of the changing economic state in early modern England and who had the power to disrupt existing hierarchies of order. Like Burnett, Neill's collection of essays looks outside the Shakespearean canon to probe how emerging ideologies of nation and empire, and of order and society, are present within power dynamics in early modern drama. Neill asserts that playwrights were 'responding to shifts in the ideology and material conditions of service' which were necessary to establishing the transforming social order.¹² His formative work on race and service examines how characters navigate power dynamics while situated within both a local and global framework. For example, his analysis of *Othello's* final scene, in which Othello, Desdemona, and Emilia lay murdered on the bed – a scene to which I return in Chapter Four – scrutinises how constructions of social, gendered, and racial identities upset strict hierarchies of order. Both Neill and Burnett look within and away from Shakespearean texts to consider the intersection of service with other frameworks for social identification, arguing that service is (or should be) central to any reading of the early modern canon. This work is invaluable to the field of service studies, especially when we consider the narrow focus of subsequent scholarly works.

Literary studies of service developed in 2005 with the publication of three New Historicist monographs on service and Shakespeare: Linda Anderson's *A Place in the Story*, Judith Weil's *Service and Dependency*, and David Evett's *Discourses of Service*.¹³ These three literary scholars of service all accept the concept Anderson clearly articulates: that 'virtually any

¹² Michael Neill, *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics, and Society in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 14.

¹³ Linda Anderson, *A Place in the Story: Servants and Service in Shakespeare's Plays* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005); David Evett, *Discourses of Service in Shakespeare's England* (New York: Palgrave, 2005); Judith Weil, *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

aspect of life could be, and often was described as a service relationship'.¹⁴ In doing so, they consider any subordinate character a 'servant', arguing that every relationship presents a superior and a subordinate, thus drawing attention to the fluid definitions service itself presents.¹⁵ The definition of 'service', as many of these scholars point out, is flexible.¹⁶ Elizabeth Rivlin, writing in 2012, examines early modern service 'as a practice that draws energy from a particular ordering of persons in a society but that also has the ability to put those relations in flux and generate new orderings'.¹⁷ Service, as Rivlin argues, 'is fundamentally a representational practice'.¹⁸ Elsewhere, she describes how 'an essential tension existed between service and servants, that is, between the act and the person'.¹⁹ Whereas Rivlin and other scholars of service in early modern drama describe 'service' as having 'an extremely broad and flexible purview', they define a 'servant' as 'one [who] is subordinate to another, whether this someone is a master, a courtly lover, the sovereign, or God'.²⁰ For example, wives could be read as servants to their husband, and children as servants to their parents. Furthermore, because women of all social

¹⁴ Anderson, p. 19.

¹⁵ Whereas Weil examines the language of service and the ways in which it defines household relationships, Evett redefines service through a theological approach, not only viewing service as a willing form of labour, but also as a vehicle towards social mobility. Both Weil and Evett engage with the impact of changing social structures on master/servant relationships, while Anderson more simply displays the extent to which Shakespeare's plays are immersed in the language of service.

¹⁶ Both David Schalkwyk and David Evett, in their individual monographs, consider the 'multilayered' qualities of service. Schalkwyk notes 'In Shakespeare especially, master-servant relationships assume intimate, multifaceted, affective, and playful forms that cannot be reduced to mere relations of power and subordination or resentful resistance'. Evett suggests, 'It is essential to realize at the outset, however, that the ideals and practices of service came at one point or another to inform the attitudes and lives of women and men at every level of society, so that even people at the highest economic and political levels sometimes felt, thought, and acted as servants'. See David Schalkwyk, *Shakespeare, Love and Service* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 4-5, and Evett, p. 1.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Rivlin, *The Aesthetics of Service in Early Modern England* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2012), p. 9.

¹⁸ Rivlin, p. 3.

¹⁹ Rivlin's work is important in that she draws attention to the paradox between subordination and agency in servant characters and to the fluidity of servant identities. She focuses on how this complex identity mirrors the playwright's position, pairing servant and author together. Elizabeth Rivlin, 'Service and Servants in Early Modern English Culture to 1660' in *Service and Servants in Early Modern Europe, 1550-1750, Journal for Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 4 (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2015), pp. 17-42, p. 18.

²⁰ Rivlin, 'Service and Servants', pp. 19-20.

ranks were dependent on men, scholars inferred that any woman in the Shakespearean canon could be defined as a ‘servant’.²¹ Evett concludes that Shakespeare’s women ‘are almost without exception faithful, as wives, as lovers, as servants, regardless of changes in circumstance’.²² In this thesis, I question how conceptualisations of elite female servants as faithful and obedient – key qualities of the idealised “good” female servant and “good” woman – are complicated when we consider with whom their loyalty lies. Emilia in Shakespeare’s *Othello* is a perfect example of this – and one to which I return in Chapter Four – as her position as Desdemona’s attendant requires that she perform loyal and obedient service to her mistress, her master (Othello), and her husband (Iago). The drama of the period challenges idealised notions of women’s faithfulness when elite female servants are depicted as wavering in their loyalty. My approach to service differs from the work of these scholars of service in that I do not read relationships of service metaphorically, but rather consider the identity and actions of servant characters within the social institution of service.

Also in 2005, and in an attempt to expand the field of service outside of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, *The Shakespeare International Yearbook* featured essays dedicated to ‘Shakespeare and the Bonds of Service’: studies which combine both ‘presentist and historicist approaches’.²³ These critics engage with various Shakespearean plays to examine how bonds of service formalise domestic and social hierarchies. In Michelle Dowd’s insightful essay – which later became a chapter in her monograph, *Women’s Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (2009) – she analyses female service in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, drawing

²¹ See Schalkwyk, p. 260.

²² Evett, pp. 180-181.

²³ See Robin Headlam Wells, ‘Introduction: Some Problems in Historical Criticism’ in *The Shakespearean International Yearbook, 5: Special section Shakespeare and the bonds of service*, ed. Michael Neill (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), pp. ix-xxx, p. xvi.

attention to the economic and marital frameworks within which Maria and Viola operate.

Dowd's approach to female servants is notable in that she considers how the emerging capitalist economy impacted the institution of service and service relationships, an issue which I take up in Chapter Two. In Dowd's essay and subsequent monograph, she argues that 'narratives about working women profoundly shape the texts in which they appear' and that '[w]omen's labour was thus crucial to the functionality of early modern social institutions as diverse as the family, the retail marketplace, and the church'.²⁴ Although this exploration is fruitful, Dowd's focus is primarily on 'working women'; she does not consider women's labour, particularly elite women's labour, within a noble or gentry household.

In a similar vein, Natasha Korda's study of working women in the early modern theatre, *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern Stage* (2011), offers a wide-ranging account of working women's contribution to theatrical productions in early modern England, and their socio-economic place within early modern playhouses.²⁵ Korda appreciably inserts working women into the scholarship of playhouses and theatre companies, detailing the diverse ways in which women participated in theatre, and considering how playwrights and actors shaped the cultural meaning of women's work. I draw on these important studies of working women which analyse how service and the emerging capitalist economy shaped the portrayal of female service experiences, to reconsider how early modern drama depicts the participation of elite women within the social institution of service.²⁶ But while scholarship has appeared in journals and

²⁴ Michelle M. Dowd, *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 2-3.

²⁵ Natasha Korda, *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

²⁶ Dowd and Korda's edited collection merges their lines of inquiry on work in early modern England, but it is not solely focused on women's work. See *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, eds. Michelle M. Dowd, Natasha Korda (Burlington, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011).

collections attending to individual characters, we have yet to see a work on the scale of those by Dowd and Korda which analyse the service elite women perform within gentry and noble households in early modern drama.

Only recently has the study of service been transformed with the publication of two crucial works which consider status and race in early modern drama: Iman Sheeha's *Household Servants in Early Modern Domestic Tragedy* (2020), and Urvashi Chakravarty's *Fictions of Consent* (2022).²⁷ Sheeha considers the portrayal of servants who occupy roles in households of the 'middling sort', servants who 'are employed by non-aristocratic masters and mistresses and engaged in mostly menial tasks'.²⁸ She proposes that domestic tragedies are concerned with 'examining the consequences of domestic disorder' and that 'these plays place the master-servant relationship at their heart'.²⁹ By considering non-elite servants, Sheeha's monograph, albeit indirectly, insists on recognising the importance of status within service narratives, and it is the same focus on status which this thesis also demands. Chakravarty's monograph, on the other hand, has reimagined the study of service as she considers the additional dimension of race-making in early modern English texts. Chakravarty looks to the figure of the servant in early modern literature to demonstrate how slavery was not a foreign phenomenon but rather embedded in the heart of English institutions. As she investigates how early modern drama stages the household and kinship relationships to justify structures of servitude, bondage, and slavery, she considers how the construction of the servant's identity poses a challenge not only to understandings of what it meant to be English but also of what it meant to be part of the early

²⁷ Iman Sheeha, *Household Servants in Early Modern Domestic Tragedy* (New York, Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), Retrieved from <<https://www.bl.uk/>>; Urvashi Chakravarty, *Fictions of Consent: Slavery, Servitude and Free Service in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

²⁸ Sheeha, 2020, Introduction, Para 10.6.

²⁹ Sheeha, 2020, Introduction, Para 10.12.

modern household. Chakravarty brings together a range of critical studies to uncover the metaphorical origins of service and slavery and to analyse their presence within early modern literature. Chapter Three of this thesis draws heavily from Chakravarty's important scholarship as it aims to situate the figure of the elite Black female servant within critical conversations of race, kinship, and institutions of labour.

The field of service in early modern drama has only recently broadened its scope as it not only interacts with a range of critical approaches but also turns away from Shakespeare's texts to offer a more comprehensive examination of service in early modern literature and culture. I seek to continue the expansion of service studies by engaging with broader critical fields, merging service studies with temporality scholarship, new economic criticism, post-colonial and critical race studies, and feminist scholarship, in order to comprehensively attend to the figure of the elite female servant as represented in the plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

"Life cycles" and Female Service: A Cultural History

To understand the representation of elite female servants in early modern drama, an awareness of their historiographical presentation and service experience is paramount. While elite female service has not been a popular topic for literary scholars examining service, studies such as McManus's *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens*, and Akkerman and Houben's *The Politics of Female Households: Ladies-in-Waiting across Early Modern Europe*, have attended to elite female service as an important feature for the cultural and historical understanding of early modern society.³⁰ In addition to these studies on elite female service,

³⁰ For key scholarship specifically on the study of elite female servants in early modern England see *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens*, ed. Clare McManus (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and *The Politics of Female Households: Ladies-in-Waiting across Early Modern Europe*, eds. Nadine Akkerman and Birgit Houben (Leiden, Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2013).

another group of scholars has examined how the experience of certain life stages can shape an individual's identity.³¹ These critics have looked at early modern conceptions of the temporal, social, and biological progression of youth and adolescence, of adulthood, and of marriage for women. In this section, I apply these concepts to elite female servants to explore the purpose and experience of elite female service in early modern England. This lays the groundwork to then, throughout this thesis, consider how this period – what I will call the “service life cycle” – is depicted in early modern literature and culture.

In early modern England, a woman's formal entrance into adulthood was delayed until marriage.³² This delay into adult life was imposed on men as well as women across the social spectrum, primarily through some form of service. As Eleanor Hubbard notes, ‘[i]n a society where the household was the basic unit of social order, young unmarried people posed a challenge’.³³ The purpose of service – be it an apprenticeship, a career at court or in the military, or domestic or elite service – was to give young people an education or income, while overseeing and regulating their actions as they left their familiar household and entered into society. When

³¹ Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos (1994) offered the first in depth exploration of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Most scholarship before the late 1990s was distinctly male oriented, but scholarship of the past thirty years has shifted to be more female-focused, arguing for a flexible and more complex understanding of female adolescence and life cycles in the early modern period. For scholarship on male youth and life cycles see Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), and Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Notable work on female youth and life cycles includes Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford's *Women in Early Modern England: 1550-1720* (1998); Jennifer Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters: Gender, Transgression, Adolescence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Elizabeth S. Cohen and Margaret Reeves (eds.), *The Youth of Early Modern England* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018). For further scholarship on childhood in early modern England, see *Shakespeare and Childhood*, (eds.) Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*, (eds.) Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (New York: Ashgate Publisher, 2011); Edell Lamb, *Reading Children in Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

³² For more on this see Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 23-4; Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England: 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, ‘Service and the coming of age of young men in seventeenth-century England’ in *Continuity and Change* 3 (1), 1988, pp. 41-64, p. 59.

³³ Eleanor Hubbard, p. 23.

young women entered service, their adolescence and youth is characterised, as Laura Gowing suggests, ‘both by a degree of independence from parents and a bound subordination in another household.’³⁴ Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford argue that service was ideally ‘meant to offer these young women a safe haven to delay their entrée into adulthood until their mid-twenties, the proper age for marriage, child-bearing, and the independent supervision of a household’.³⁵ Elite female service serves to both educate and oversee young women until they are deemed socially ready to marry. Marriage, therefore, marks an end to the service period, and the beginning of the life cycle of adulthood.

Early modern writers often describe the female life cycle as a tripartite model, depicting three identities all of which were generated by women’s relation to men: maid, wife, and widow. The editors of *Religion and Life Cycles in Early Modern England* work to reimagine the concept of life cycles, arguing that ‘individual timelines are distinct and that individual perceptions of ageing and rites of passage can shift’ and therefore, ‘the life cycle was not something fixed, absolute, or universal in the early modern period’.³⁶ They highlight how life cycles were conceived in various forms: that is, biologically (the progression from ‘childbirth to puberty to menstruation’ and so forth until death), socially (schooling, the coming of age, entering service or a profession, marriage, parenthood, widowhood), and religiously (the joining of a particular faith, potential conversions, and events marked by religion or spiritual awakenings).³⁷ Service is therefore embedded in both a woman’s social, biological, and – as I will explore in more detail in Chapter One – religious life cycle: it encompasses the intermediate, transitional stage between

³⁴ Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (New York, Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2012), p. 47.

³⁵ Mendelson and Crawford, p. 96.

³⁶ Caroline Bowden, Emily Vine and Tessa Whitehouse (eds.), *Religion and Life Cycles in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), Introduction, Para 10.6, Retrieved from <<https://www.bl.uk/>>.

³⁷ Bowden, Vine and Whitehouse, Introduction, Para 10.6.

childhood and marriage.³⁸ It allows a woman to progress from adolescence to marriage, with the hope that she will also, upon marriage, progress from menstruation to pregnancy.³⁹ However, the “service life cycle” was simultaneously and paradoxically constructed around the intention of delaying that progression to marriage and an eventual pregnancy. If a woman never married and remained delayed in perpetual service, as I will explore in Chapter One, her biological and social life cycle remained in a state of stagnation.

Service marked a transition from childhood towards adulthood as a young woman left her natal household and travelled to another’s home to gain the necessary wifely skills required for marriage. Whereas domestic female servants were mobile in service, frequently moving from household to household, elite female servants seemed to remain in one household until marriage.⁴⁰ But how exactly did a woman enter elite service? As with marriage for those of high social status, entering service was a matter of navigating elite kinship networks. John Astell’s letter to his cousin Sir William Smyth (1621), requesting that he may send his daughter Ursula into William’s wife’s service in London, offers a rare illustration of the interplay between elite female service and elite kinship networks:

therefore I am a suitor to you and her that you would be so kind vnto me to take my daughter Ur-sula into your service to waite uppon her. Shee is new growen to those yeres that shes is fitt for seruice: and shee hath the best education that I and my wyfe cann give her to serve in the place of a waiting woman. If you and my Ladie please to accept of her I shall god willing send

³⁸ As I will discuss in Chapter One, service is, in ways, part of a woman’s religious life cycle as the waiting for salvation which is inherent to the Christian experience is metaphorically lived out by those in service whose salvation comes with marriage.

³⁹ The temporal ambiguities of childhood, adolescence and youth has complicated our understandings of early modern life cycles and gendered identities. Kate Chedgzoy suggests that “[a]dolescence is a site where the gendering of childhood comes into particularly clear focus, revealing that not only the experience of childhood but the stages of life themselves may be different for boys and girls’. See Kate Chedgzoy, ‘Introduction: ‘What, are they children?’ in *Shakespeare and Childhood*, (eds.) Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 15- 31, p. 23.

⁴⁰ For more on this, see Eleanor Hubbard’s *City Women* (2012) for detailed scholarship on the mobility of maidservants in London.

her upp in Easter terme next for before that tyme there will not be any convenient iournyeng from hence.⁴¹

It is because of Astell's familial bond to Sir Smyth and his cousin's titled, elite status that Ursula has the chance to serve as a waiting woman. Astell's letter not only illustrates the practical nature of a woman's entry into elite service, but also exemplifies how kinship networks functioned to move relations between familiar households. Elizabeth S. Cohen and Margaret Reeds suggest that protecting a young woman's 'virginity and honour became a more pressing task for families and for surrogate kin such as masters and mistresses'.⁴² There is some security to be had in sending one's daughter to serve in a known and respected household, aware that she is at far less risk of sexual corruption and violation than she would be in a stranger's household.⁴³ These elite alliances were a resource which allowed for women to enter into a social superior's network they might not otherwise encounter, and to not only be under the tutelage of an established, elite woman but also to hopefully find a potential partner who would advance them socially. However, these young women were away from their immediate family and therefore in precarious positions, and it is this vulnerability which makes these women perfect figures for drama.

We see a similar navigation of elite networks on the continent in Annibal Guasco's discourse (1619) to his daughter, Lady Lavinia, in which he comments that he could not have successfully placed his daughter in the Duchess of Savoy's household 'if I had not had some diligent and stalwart intermediary who could put your name forward to the Infanta and give her

⁴¹ 'John Astell to Sir Wm. Smithe', Document Ref.: SP 14/123 f.93 Folio Numbers: ff. 93 Date: Oct. 27 1621, Source Archive: The National Archives of the UK Gale Document Number: MC4319583066 State Papers Online, Gale, Cengage Learning, 2022. Many thanks to Lucy Munro for drawing my attention to this document.

⁴² Elizabeth S. Cohen and Margaret Reeves, *The Youth of Early Modern England* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), p. 22.

⁴³ Laura Gowing's work (*Domestic Dangers* and *Gender Relations*) surveys court cases to highlight the sexual vulnerability of female servants. Mendelson and Crawford's work and Eleanor Hubbard's also suggests that the threat of sexual corruption and transgressions against women in service was notable in early modern England.

such an account of your achievements'.⁴⁴ Guasco details how he used his elite networks within the Italian Academic Academy to find an intermediary, Baron Sfondrato, who would advocate for Lavinia to enter the Infanta's service. Both Guasco's and Astell's writings emphasise that their daughters have received a proper education at home which has prepared them to enter into elite service so they may continue their education. In his discourse, Guasco reminds Lavinia that her education, namely her study of music and writing, was intended to prepare her specifically for her successful career at court. Although Guasco's advice is primarily intended for her role at court, he subtly points towards her future and how her education and behaviour at court will prepare her to be a wife: 'In this way, accustoming yourself in these early years of your life to look after your possessions in the manner I have explained to you, you will come to be prudent and skilled in domestic management if at some future date it should befall you to have a house to run'.⁴⁵ This preparation is similar to what Sir Edmund Molineux wants for his daughters; he, too, suggests that in sending his daughters to serve in a cousin's household, he hopes they may be brought up 'in virtue, good manners and learning to play the gentlewomen and good housewives'.⁴⁶ An elite woman's initial education at home would include skills such as music, singing, dancing, languages, reading, writing and needlework, and she would then transition into elite service to receive a domestic and social education, learning to assume the role of the elite housewife.

As it becomes clear that families advocated for their daughters to enter into elite service, be it at court or in a social superior's household, the question is raised as to why we rarely ever

⁴⁴ Annibal Guasco, '*Discourse to Lady Lavinia His Daughter*', ed. Peggy Osborn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 57.

⁴⁵ Guasco, p. 84.

⁴⁶ As quoted in Linda Pollack's article "'Teach her to live under obedience': The making of women in the upper ranks of early modern England' in *Continuity and Change* 4 (2), 1989, pp. 231-258, p. 236.

witness an elite woman enter service in early modern drama, unless she is gender-crossing?⁴⁷ In *Twelfth Night* (1601-2), upon hearing that Olivia ‘hath abjured the company / And sight of men’, Viola hopes to serve her so she ‘might not be delivered to the world / Till I had made mine own occasion mellow – / What my estate is’ – that is, so she may delay her entrance into society (1.2.37-41).⁴⁸ However, as she quickly learns that Olivia will not admit anyone into her household, she instead seeks to enter into Duke Orisino’s service, disguised as a eunuch.⁴⁹ Viola chooses to enter service to gain time in order to delay her social progression until her familial estates are settled. She uses service to delay any formal entrance into adulthood, therefore finding protection within service.⁵⁰

John Fletcher’s *The Loyal Subject* (1618) is one of the few plays to depict elite women entering courtly service. As the lustful Duke instructs his general, Archas, to send his daughters Honora and Viola to court to serve in his sister Olympia’s household, the sisters try to delay their

⁴⁷ Following recent scholarship in trans and queer studies, I use the term ‘gender-crossing’ rather than ‘cross-dressing’ because it more accurately describes the complexities and movement of gender identity and expression across and between male and female binaries. Scholarship on cross-dressing, as Marjorie Rubright describes, ‘has focused on the relation of clothing to the body beneath, the relation of clothing to the “deep making” of gender, and on the complex ways in which gender was prosthetically materialized in this period’ (pp. 62-3). Thinking in terms of ‘gender-crossing’ not only allows for a more nuanced and fluid approach to conceptualising a character’s identity, but also encourages scholars to consider how character and actor identities may overlap or blur distinctions and binaries. For more on this see, ed. Simone Chess, Colby Gordon, Will Fisher, ‘Introduction: Early Modern Trans Studies’ in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Vol. 19, N. 4, Fall 2019, pp. 1-25, p.7; Marjorie Rubright, ‘Transgender Capacity in Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl* (1611)’ in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Vol. 19, N. 4, Fall 2019, pp. 45-74; Simone Chess, *Male-to-Female Crossdressing in Early Modern English Literature: Gender, Performance, and Queer Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁴⁸ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, The Arden Third Series, ed. Keir Elam (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2008).

⁴⁹ Abdulhamit Arvas’s recent work on eunuchs and trans theory recognises: ‘Shakespeare’s ubiquitous deployment of the eunuch is typical: he often mentions eunuchs alongside other oriental curiosities and in contexts that stress gender inversion/ambiguity and racial “otherness”’ and that ‘[i]n *Twelfth Night*, the eunuch is again associated with gender ambiguity and other exotic figures’. See Abdulhamit Arvas, ‘Early Modern Eunuchs and the Transing of Gender and Race’ in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Vol. 19, N. 4, Fall 2019, pp. 116-136, p. 127.

⁵⁰ When women gender-cross in early modern drama, they often do so in pursuit of their male lover. However, there are not many examples of female characters entering service as men and when they do, they often present themselves as lower status pages. See Julia in Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1593-4) and Luce in Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604).

entrance into courtly society. Appearing to have a heightened awareness of the court's sexual reputation, Honora rebukes her father for their lack of education:

Besides, we are altogether unprovided,
Unfurnisht utterly of the rules should guide us:
This Lord comes, licks his hand, and protests to me;
Compares my Beauty to a thousand fine things;
[...]
He offers me the honourable courtesie,
To lye with me all night, what a misery is this?
I am bred up so foolishly, alas, I dare not,
And how madly these things will shew there.

(3.2.32-41)⁵¹

Honora strategically underscores how ill-prepared she and her sister are for court, as she draws on a hypothetical situation in which her naivety has left her vulnerable to the court's corruptive behaviour. In depicting their entrance to court, Fletcher not only highlights the sexual vulnerability of women in service, but also, as in many of his other plays, presents a tyrannous and lustful ruler. Whereas in *Twelfth Night*, Viola enters service not only for protection and security but also to delay her entrance into adulthood, the sisters in *The Loyal Subject* suggest that by entering service and leaving the natal household, they are more vulnerable to the court's sexual threats. Whether a woman was entering into elite female service or gender-crossing as a male servant, their susceptibility to male sexual aggression was a legitimate concern. Playwrights expose this vulnerability in service as they explore how these women experience the "service live cycle". Perhaps a woman's entrance into service is seldom shown in early modern drama because it was arranged privately, via written letters, and therefore did not make for the most

⁵¹ John Fletcher, *The Loyal Subject*, ed. Fredson Bowers, in *The Beaumont and Fletcher Canon* Vol. V, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

exciting drama. Playwrights, rather, capitalised on depicting conflicts that occurred during the service period in order to create dramatic tension.

When a woman entered elite female service, she continued to practice the skills she learned at home (music, writing, foreign languages) by performing these for her new mistress. She would write letters for her mistress, do needlework with her, and entertain her when she so desired. The queens' courts, as Clare McManus demonstrates, 'were enabling spaces for women's education and cultural engagement more generally'.⁵² An elite identity was performative, and elite female servants were offered various opportunities (especially at court) to practice and present their education. McManus suggests that the 'link between education and performance was reciprocal: courtly education demanded the display of skills taught'.⁵³ Developing and performing elite skills was an important part of courtly life for maids of honour. Masques, for example, were a way for elite female servants to practice their skills (embroidery, music, languages) and to publicly present their elite identity. Although there is little existing scholarship about noble and gentry households, it appears that elite female servants continued these practices on a smaller scale. In Brathwaite's *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), a companion guide directed at elite women entering service, he describes the ideal candidate as a woman who:

hath been so well Schooled in the Discipline of this *Age*, as shee onely desires to retaine in memory that *forme* which is least affected but most comely; to consort with such as may improve her *Knowledge and practise* of goodnesse by their company.⁵⁴

⁵² Clare McManus, 'Introduction: The Queen's Court' in *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens*, ed. Clare McManus (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 1-17, p. 8.

⁵³ Clare McManus, 'Memorialising Anna of Denmark's Court: *Cupid's Banishment* at Greenwich Palace', in *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens*, ed. Clare McManus (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 81-99, p. 91.

⁵⁴ Brathwaite, q3v-q4r.

Brathwaite's manual touches on the ways an elite female servant would bring their prior knowledge of dancing or music into the household, to learn from an elite mistress how best to conduct themselves in preparation for marriage. Similarly, Castiglione's list of qualities a waiting gentlewoman should cultivate includes knowledge of dancing, drawing, and painting. Elite female servants, be it at court or in a noble or gentry household, were expected to develop and perfect their education in preparation for elite wifedom.

Elite female servants, however, did not only provide companionship and entertainment for their mistress, but also were required to perform menial tasks which interacted directly with their mistress's body such as dressing her, serving her at meals, and helping her to wash.⁵⁵ Helen Payne notes that elite women performed 'quite menial tasks [...] tasks performed for them, in turn, by much lower-ranking women'.⁵⁶ It is these menial tasks that offer elite women a wifely education as when married they are expected to both serve (their husband) and be served. Their dual identity as servant and as mistress allows them to understand what is expected of servants in a household while offering them the opportunity to practice the role of mistress with their own personal servants.⁵⁷ In this thesis, I explore how this dual position at court as both mistress and servant complicates how elite female servants shape their own narrative.

Prescriptive literature of the period encourages servants to direct their focus to diligent and obedient service in order to maintain a functioning household. Gouge instructs all servants to

⁵⁵ These tasks were often performed by the married women who served the queen in her bedchamber and privy chamber, but maids of honour were nevertheless expected to be prepared to serve the queen in such a way. Although there is not much evidence, it appears that in noble and gentry households, waiting gentlewomen and waiting women fulfilled these menial duties.

⁵⁶ Helen Payne, *Aristocratic Women and the Jacobean Court: 1603-1625* (Royal Holloway and Bedford New College: unpublished PhD, 2001), p. 67.

⁵⁷ Conduct manuals, such as Brathwaite's *The English Gentlewoman* discuss how these women know both how to 'obey' and 'command', being both mistress and servant (qq2). Little scholarship exists on the servants of elite female servants (such as a waiting gentlewoman at court to a maid of honour). For some mention of this, see Payne's (2001) and Merton's (1992) unpublished PhDs.

be ‘both quicke and diligent in their seruice: for these are effects of willingnesse. [...] Contrary is the idleness, laziness, slothfulnesse, and slugishnesse of seruants’.⁵⁸ Obedience and loyalty were virtuous qualities which opposed the transgressive quality of idleness. These behavioural qualities were not only expected of servants but also of women in the early modern period. Conduct literature insists that women – be it the aristocrat or chambermaid – behave according to certain gendered models of femininity. These texts conceptualise women in a binary form, presenting them as either good or bad: the good woman is chaste, virtuous, obedient, and remains at home; the bad woman is sexually transgressive, rebellious, and inhabits spaces outside of the domestic home.

Having an awareness of the ideologies and conceptualisations of gender and of femininity in the early modern period is essential to understanding how dynamics of gender operated, particularly within household structures and service relationships. The dominant ideology presented the feminine ideal in such a way as to enforce female subjugation in all aspects of life. Female subjectivity in the early modern period, as Karen Newman explains, is ‘the construction of the gendered subject and the ideology of women’s submission or subjection to men’.⁵⁹ For example, in religious discourse, the creation story tied female subjectivity to the making of female and male bodies. Laura Gowing notes that ‘[e]arly modern biblical commentators and preachers noted that Eve was made *after* Adam; *from* Adam [...] and *for* Adam. The biblical narrative contained truths that applied to all humanity: all women were made for their husbands’.⁶⁰ Conduct literature frequently drew from religious discourses, referring to the intemperate action of Eve in order to construct idealised femininity. If Eve is the temptress,

⁵⁸ Gouge, *Of Domestic Duties*, Rr7v.

⁵⁹ Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 18.

⁶⁰ Laura Gowing, *Gender in Early Modern England*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2022), p. 17.

impatient and willing to take action – action which results in the fall of man – then the good woman is everything Eve is not: chaste, patient, and passive. Brathwaite advises the English gentlewoman entering into elite service against a ‘wanton fancy, or wandering frenzy’, noting that ‘Eve looked on the fruit before shee coveted, coveting shee tasted, tasting shee perished. Thus aspiring to the knowledge of good and euill, became to her and her posterity euill’.⁶¹ As Brathwaite imagines the elite female servant, he cannot do so without setting the ‘good’ gentlewoman against the ‘loose English gentlewoman’.⁶²

The binary of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ woman extends to the presentation of female servants: the ‘good’ female servant is constructed in terms of an ideal of dutiful behaviour in which she conducts herself in an obedient and chaste manner, remaining loyal to the household in which she serves. As Burnett notes, the conceptualisation of the ‘good’ female servant ‘contrasts with and also complements patriarchal assumptions about her sexuality’.⁶³ To be a good woman and a good servant, elite female servants were expected to strive for an idealised (and often unattainable) model of femininity. On the other hand, the ‘bad’ or ‘disruptive’ female servant, Burnett suggests, was believed to have ‘collapsed distinctions for her own ends, and whose ‘deedes’ could be construed as socially disruptive’.⁶⁴ The ‘bad’ female servant was conceptualised as disobediently acting on her own accord, being sexually promiscuous, and staining the household’s reputation.

Yet, in early modern drama, elite female servant characters constantly blur the boundary between the image of the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ servant and between that of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ woman. For example, in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Henry VIII* – a play to which I return in

⁶¹ Brathwaite, T2r-v.

⁶² Brathwaite, qq3r.

⁶³ Burnett, p. 126.

⁶⁴ See Burnett’s chapter on female servants for a breakdown of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ female servant, pp. 125-9.

Chapter One – Anne Boleyn is constructed as the ‘good’ woman, one whose ‘[b]eauty and honour [...] are so mingled / That they have caught the king’ (2.3.76-7). Although Anne is recognised for her ‘good’ feminine qualities, her marriage to the king dismantles household order as she usurps her mistress’s position as Queen. Anne can therefore be read as having qualities of both the ‘good’ woman and the ‘bad’ servant. Recent theorisations of gender – notably that of queer and trans studies – have recognised how characters cross binaries of gender identity, ‘blurring distinctions and specificity’.⁶⁵ Throughout this thesis, I draw on these theories to consider how the binary between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ elite female servant identity in early modern drama is unstable. Elite female servants are in a unique position as they are able to disrupt binaries. Both empowered and disempowered at once, as elite women with agency and as household subordinates, they are simultaneously dependent on their mistress and yet driven by a sense of a claim on social mobility (which can only be obtained through marriage). These plays use elite female servant characters to challenge binaries of oppositional difference, and to construct nuanced and complex characters whose actions complicate socially fixed dynamics of power and of gender within the early modern household.

It is important to note that conceptualisations of virtuous femininity and of the ‘good’ female servant in the early modern period repeatedly employed qualities of whiteness.

Whiteness, or fairness, as Farah Karim-Cooper suggests ‘is linked to a network of qualities associated with virtue and all that is good’.⁶⁶ In early modern literature, the ‘good’ woman’s

⁶⁵ Chess, Gordon, and Fisher, p. 7. For more on recent theorisations of gender, see footnote 47. This thesis is also influenced by Judith Butler’s foundational theories of gender, which suggest that gender, rather than being an essential identity assigned at birth, is performative and unfixed. To call gender performative suggests that ‘the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated’. For Butler, the repetition of performative gender is both a ‘reenactment and a re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established’. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, Routledge, 1990), p.140.

⁶⁶ Farah Karim-Cooper, ‘The Materials of Race: Staging the Black and White Binary in Early Modern Theatre’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 17-29, p. 18.

appearance and behaviour often evokes the rhetoric of whiteness or fairness.⁶⁷ When Oriana in Fletcher's *The Knight of Malta* announces, '[b]ehold me in this spotless white I weare, / The Embleme of my life, of all my actions', she claims whiteness to be representative of her virtue and purity (2.5.35-6).⁶⁸ In early modern England, whiteness is attached, as Kim F. Hall argues, 'to values – purity, virginity, and innocence – represented by (or notably absent in) women'.⁶⁹ Karim-Cooper notes that '[i]n many of these foundational texts on conduct as well as in the love poetry of the medieval and Renaissance periods, a white and shimmering complexion in particular is positioned as an ideal and as an essential component in the construction of womanhood'.⁷⁰ Although references to whiteness and its association with idealised femininity were widespread in literature, the linkage is best exemplified by Queen Elizabeth herself, who created what Peter Erickson has identified as 'a cult of whiteness', in which, as Arthur Little Jr. explains, 'Elizabeth's whiteness presumably radiated out to others in the court' and with it carried 'a sense of distinction and superiority'.⁷¹ Whiteness is a somatic marker not only of virtuous femininity but also of social status. Little observes that 'Whiteness worked as a property, a marker, of the socially elite, who could theoretically be easily distinguished from the

⁶⁷ For more on this, see the Introduction and Chapter Two in Kim F. Hall's *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995)

⁶⁸ John Fletcher, *The Knight of Malta*, ed. George Walton Williams, in *The Beaumont and Fletcher Canon* Vol. VIII, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁶⁹ Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness*, p. 9.

⁷⁰ Karim-Cooper, p. 18.

⁷¹ Peter Erickson, 'Representations of Blacks and Blackness in the Renaissance' in *Criticism* 35.4 (1993), pp. 499-527, p. 517; Arthur Little Jr., 'Introduction: Assembling an Aristocracy of Skin' in *White People in Shakespeare: Essays on Race, Culture, and the Elite*, ed. Arthur Little Jr. (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2023), pp. 1-26, p. 5. For more on Queen Elizabeth's use of cosmetic whiteness, see Chapter Two in Kim F. Hall's *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995); Chapter Two in Farah Karim-Cooper's *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, rev. edn 2019); Kimberley Poitevin, 'Inventing Whiteness: Cosmetics, Race, and Women in Early Modern England' in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Spring/Summer 2011, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011), pp. 59-89.

lower classes “whose work [would have made] it difficult or impossible for them to stay pale”.⁷² Thinking about how whiteness intersects with social status can nuance our understanding of dynamics of power within service relationships. For example, Little questions how we could ‘think about Portia’s aristocratic whiteness versus Nerissa’s gentlewomanly whiteness in *The Merchant of Venice*’.⁷³ In Chapter Four, I consider how, in *Othello*, Desdemona’s noble whiteness is different from Emilia’s middling whiteness. Throughout this thesis, I read whiteness as a racial category, one which intersects with the construction of gender, sexuality, nationality, and status to shape dynamics of power.⁷⁴

In each chapter of this thesis, I consider how elite female servants perform qualities of gendered femininity – patience, chastity, moral virtue, and obedience – and present themselves as the ‘good’ servant in order to further their own interests of advancement or to claim authority. For example, in Chapter One, I examine how Anne in *Henry VIII* evokes the performance of patience to confirm her moral virtue, and the ways in which this leads to her marriage and social advancement. Chapter Two looks at how Helen in *All’s Well that Ends Well* employs qualities of chastity to claim Bertram as her husband. Chapter Three considers how Black elite female servants undermine the legibility and performance of whiteness as a signifier of moral virtue. Chapter Four analyses how the performance of obedience enables Paulina in *The Winter’s Tale* to claim authority over Leontes, and how it hinders Emilia in *Othello* from enacting good and loyal service, as both Desdemona’s servant and as Iago’s wife. Although elite female servants were expected to strive for an ideal, embodying qualities of femininity and presenting themselves as

⁷² Arthur Little Jr., ‘Is it Possible to Read Shakespeare through Critical White Studies?’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 268-280, p. 271.

⁷³ Little Jr., ‘Is It Possible’, p. 277.

⁷⁴ In Chapter Three, I examine both whiteness and blackness as racial categories, and consider how the racialised binary of white/black is present in the construction of idealised femininity and serves to distinguish between virtue and sin.

the 'good' servant, early modern drama frequently portrays them as contradicting and manipulating this ideal as they strive to further their own self-interests.

During the period of service, an elite woman was ultimately expected to maintain her chastity and not engage in sexual activity so she may be prepared for marriage. Marriage was an important step in the progression of social, biological, and religious life cycles. Although child marriages sometimes occurred amongst the highest elites, they were not the norm. Mendelson and Crawford suggest that '[i]f a girl married young, adolescence was a brief life-stage, but, in the majority of cases, it was extended because most women married in their mid- to late twenties'.⁷⁵ Much like entering service, entering a courtship was a family affair which extended to the household in which one served. A woman in service required the permission of her master or mistress to marry. As Mendelson and Crawford note, '[a]mong the prosperous classes, parents and other kin played a more prominent role in initiating and concluding a match'.⁷⁶ Elite women were privileged in that their education and service period at either court or in a socially superior household increased the likelihood of securing a mobile and profitable marriage. In Guasco's correspondence, he emphasises how essential it is for him to obtain permission from Lavinia's employers in order for her to marry:

Count Guido Emanuel Langosco, a knight of Pavia, is the person in question who, if it should please Your Excellency to confirm the Infanta's consent and the wishes of the young pair, will not, I am sure, disappoint you nor displease you as a new retainer, and so both he, Lady Lavinia and myself all rely on Your Excellency's magnanimous goodness to favor and help us in this matter.⁷⁷

Although Lady Lavinia's employers happily granted her approval to marry, this was not the case for all masters and mistresses in early modern England. Masters and mistresses had the authority

⁷⁵ Mendelson and Crawford, p. 79.

⁷⁶ Mendelson and Crawford, p. 108.

⁷⁷ Guasco, p. 112.

to delay their servants from leaving their household. Queen Elizabeth was notorious for this towards the end of her reign, as she frequently refused to allow her women to marry. Marriage allowed a woman to socially and biologically progress out of the “service life cycle” as they became wives and, potentially, mothers. The marriage contract, unlike the service contract, commemorates the conclusion of youth and the start of adulthood. However, as Chapter One will detail, social and biological life cycles are sometimes misaligned: older elite female servants, for example, progress through youth while remaining in the social life cycle of service. Early modern drama notably portrays elite female servants at distinct stages throughout the “service life cycle”, yet rarely do we witness its conclusion. Understanding the ideological principles and natural progression that was expected to occur during the “service life cycle”, as well as the ways conceptualisations of the ideal elite female servant mirrors idealisations of femininity in the early modern period, can transform our sense of elite female service in early modern England and allow us to reassess the roles of servant characters in early modern drama.

Stratifications of Service and Terminology Issues

Michelle Dowd suggests that because female servants ‘had been removed from their birth homes and their parents’ supervision, their social status was especially ambiguous’.⁷⁸ However, there is nothing ambiguous about a female servant’s social status, specifically that of elite female servant’s, in early modern England. Hierarchies amongst elite female servants, which marked fixed stratifications of service identities, are recognised in laws and literature of the period. Social status was essential to shaping an individual’s social identity, and sumptuary laws worked to ensure that identity was performative. Queen Elizabeth’s ‘Proclamation Against Excess

⁷⁸ Michelle Dowd, ‘Desiring Subjects: Staging the Female Servant in Early Modern Tragedies’ in *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Michelle Dowd and Natasha Korda (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 131-144, p. 133.

Apparel' (1580) regulated dress codes, dictating what one was permitted to wear in accordance with one's social status. For example, a gentlewoman attending on a Duchess, Marquess, or Countess may dress herself to the same degree as a wife whose income was 100 *pounds* per year, but a gentlewoman attending upon elite women of a slightly lower degree such as Viscounts' wives, Barons' wives, the wives of Knights of the order and of the privy council, may only dress herself to the same degree as a wife whose income was 100 *marks* per year.⁷⁹ These sumptuary laws denote minute degrees of status to identify the social position of gentlewomen serving in various noble and gentry households. Specific hierarchical stratifications are also present in the comparison of a maid of honour's clothing and that of a waiting gentlewoman: one of the queen's women may dress herself in velvet, 'tuffed taffata', or satin with gold or silver in her cloak or 'sauegard', but a waiting gentlewoman may only wear 'damask, taffeta, or silk' in her cloak or 'sauegard'.⁸⁰ The case of clothing is a quintessential example of how clearly defined these social roles were in early modern England. These titles explicitly characterise what to an early modern reader would be notable social and economic differences.

In this section, I will identify primary sources – plays and conduct literature – which detail the stratifications of unmarried, elite women in service, with a focus on those that served in great households and held the positions of waiting woman and waiting gentlewoman, and those at court who were maids of honour. What becomes clear is the understanding early modern writers had of elite women in service roles which modern scholars have overlooked and misunderstood. In this thesis, I focus on characters who are assigned these three identities because they specifically define elite, unmarried servants. Married women, it seems, only re-entered service if they were chosen by the queen at court – to serve her corporeal body – or if a

⁷⁹ Anon., *By the Queen. A proclamation with certain clauses of diverse statutes* (London, 1580), A4r.

⁸⁰ Anon., A4r-A4v.

Lady or elite woman required companionship and care.⁸¹ These women do not often appear in early modern drama, perhaps because their marriage has granted them a stable identity: they do not exist in the liminal state occupied by unmarried servants. However, as I will explore in Chapter Four, when playwrights do include married women performing acts of service (like Emilia in *Othello* and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*), these characters speak to greater issues of ordering in both the household and society; it is the ambiguity and confusion of their positions as both wives and as women enacting service that playwrights draw from to create dramatic conflict. Although neither plays nor conduct literature portray verisimilitude but rather an ideal state of service (conduct literature) or a moment of crisis (drama), both offer us a glimpse into the social hierarchies and expectations that were popularised by print and engraved in law.⁸²

Elite female servants were of upper middling or established gentry status, and notably, served in households above their own social status. In early modern England, those who held noble titles such as 'Duke' or 'Duchess', 'Marquess', 'Earl' or 'Count', 'Viscount', or 'Baron' – were the upper echelons of society. For example, a Duke ranked below that of a prince, often ruled over a duchy, and held significant political power.⁸³ A Marquess was the second rank in the

⁸¹ There are historical instances of a married woman re-entering service other than to serve the queen at court, however, these women were notably not in service for an elite, wifely education. Aemelia Lanyer, it seems, a few years after having married Lord Hunsdon, went to Cookham with Lady Margaret Clifford and her daughter Lady Anne Clifford, while the women took solace in a female-centred household, separated from men. Although these historical women were in a kind of service, it was different from the elite service this thesis examines. These elite, married women served as companions, fulfilling similar roles to the Ladies of the Bedchamber or Privy Chamber, yet not in a courtly setting.

⁸² Although the changes at court that occurred between the reigns of Elizabeth and James directly affected the authority and agency of elite female servants – in that when a woman like Elizabeth occupied the throne, her elite female servants were at their zenith, serving the queen regent, whereas Queen Anna's elite female servants served the queen consort – these changes do not appear to be reflected in the portrayal of elite female servants in the period's drama. In this thesis, I survey a range of plays across both Elizabeth's and James's reign (1590-1625), but I will not focus on the shifting court structures as my analysis of elite female servants holds true across the change in monarchs.

⁸³ 'Duke, 3a', *OED Online*, Oxford English Dictionary < www.oed.com/view/Entry/48814 > [Accessed 02.09.2023].

peerage and oversaw a march (frontier district).⁸⁴ An Earl (or a Count) governed a county and was responsible for his region.⁸⁵ A Viscount was a member of the fourth order of the peerage and oversaw a smaller district.⁸⁶ A Baron held the lowest noble ranking and controlled small territories and estates.⁸⁷ Those who held these titles, and their families, were identified for their status, wealth, and power.

An ongoing research project led by Catherine Richardson at the University of Kent, ‘Middling Culture’, deconstructs and details the lives of those with ‘middling’ status to categorise degrees of social status, with a focus on wealth.⁸⁸ For example, to be of the ‘Established Gentry’:

you had a title like Lady, earl, or duke, or often “gentleman” or “gentlewoman,” and [...] you have possessed a coat of arms since birth. Established gentry sorts were often very wealthy and frequently had landed estates which were made up of ancestral land and properties passed through generations. They were rich enough that they often did not have to work in order to survive and could employ lots of servants for their houses and wage labourers on their land in order to generate an income. [...] although some of these families were much poorer than new gentry and upper middling individuals, idealistically they aligned themselves with ancestral values which place them behaviourally within this group.⁸⁹

The Established Gentry encompassed a spectrum of titled social positions, often attributed to members of the nobility. These individuals and families held social titles which had been inherited. ‘Middling Culture’ also recognises those of ‘Elite Middling/ Upper Gentry’ status:

⁸⁴ ‘Marquess, 1.2’, *OED Online*, Oxford English Dictionary < www.oed.com/view/Entry/48814 > [Accessed 02.09.2023].

⁸⁵ ‘Earl, 3b’, *OED Online*, Oxford English Dictionary < www.oed.com/view/Entry/48814 > [Accessed 02.09.2023].

⁸⁶ ‘Viscount, 2’, *OED Online*, Oxford English Dictionary < www.oed.com/view/Entry/48814 > [Accessed 02.09.2023].

⁸⁷ ‘Baron, 2a’, *OED Online*, Oxford English Dictionary < www.oed.com/view/Entry/48814 > [Accessed 02.09.2023].

⁸⁸ The ‘Middling Culture’ ‘Social Status Calculator’, inspired by the 2013 BBC *Great British Class Calculator* lists social status in early modern England as such (from highest to lowest): Established Gentry, Elite Middling/New Gentry, Upper Middling, Professional Middling, Solid/Accumulative Middling, Precarious Emergent/Latent Middling, Precarious Household Middling, Dependent Middling, Wage Labourer, Dependent Poor.

<<https://middlingculture.com/social-statuses-of-early-modern-england/#Gentry>> [Accessed 17 August 2023].

⁸⁹ ‘Established Gentry in ‘Middling Culture’ <<https://middlingculture.com/social-statuses-of-early-modern-england/#Gentry>> [Accessed 17 August 2023].

these ‘new gentry individuals’ became rich and ‘sometimes gained titles’.⁹⁰ With the transformation from the feudal system to an emerging capitalist economy came the ability for individuals to socially advance through wealth: they need not be born into a title but could acquire one in their lifetime.

What I find most curious in the project’s classifications is the ways in which the term ‘gentlewoman’ blurs the boundaries of degrees of social status. For example, a ‘gentlewoman’ could be part of the ‘Established Gentry’ if they inherited the title but could also be part of the ‘New Gentry’ if their family acquired the title. The project even details how those of ‘Professional Middling Status’ – doctors, lawyers, clergy members (those defined by a high level of literacy) – ‘might be styled “gentlemen”’ or their female kin could be ‘gentlewomen’, and could therefore claim these titles if they ‘attended university or inns of court’:

However, despite this claim to gentility, these (often urbanised and educated) middling individuals have particular lifestyle markers, working practices, networks, and outlooks that make them distinct from the landed gentry: they rely on the income gained from their profession to survive, they often seek to achieve local positions of office like town clerk, they have no gentry lineage or coats of arms; are without country estates; and are sometimes not very wealthy at all. In fact, wealth is not a significant indicator of status in this category.⁹¹

These various descriptions of ‘gentlewoman’ complicate how we understand the social status of elite female servants, particularly those who held the title of waiting gentlewoman or even waiting woman in early modern England. Because a ‘gentlewoman’ could identify as part of the ‘Established Gentry’, the ‘New Gentry’, and even extend two stratifications down into the ‘Professional Middling’, the position of an elite female servant could encompass varying degrees of status within a specific title. This proves quite challenging for pinpointing the exact social

⁹⁰ ‘Elite Middling/New Gentry’ in ‘Middling Culture’ <<https://middlingculture.com/social-statuses-of-early-modern-england/#Gentry>> [Accessed 17 August, 2023].

⁹¹ ‘Professional Middling’ in ‘Middling Culture’ <<https://middlingculture.com/social-statuses-of-early-modern-england/#Gentry>> [Accessed 17 August, 2023].

position of an elite female servant in early modern English drama. I return to this in Chapter Two, in which I use the ‘Middling Culture’ stratifications as a framework to analyse degrees of status within *All’s Well that Ends Well*. However, in the remainder of this section, I outline the service hierarchy as a way to clarify the terminology and traits associated with elite female servant positions.

The social hierarchy of a queen’s court serves as a model for the noble and gentry households which, in effect, mirror in simplified ways the complex structures of court. In Sir Thomas Wilson’s *The State of England* (1600), his account of ‘about twenty women’ seated for dinner describes a great table with ‘all the Queen’s maids’ and a separate table for ‘all Wayting gentlewomen of great Ladies’.⁹² Wilson sets out a clear hierarchy of female servants: the queen’s elite female servants ate at one table, separated from their own waiting gentlewomen. This was the elite female servant hierarchy at court: waiting gentlewomen – women of elite status – were in service to a mistress (i.e., maid of honour or Lady of the Bedchamber) who then served the queen.⁹³ These stratifications are depicted in early modern drama. For example, in Fletcher’s *A Wife for a Month* – a play to which I will return in Chapter One – Evanthe serves the Queen as a maid of honour, but she too has her own waiting gentlewoman, Cassandra. Both women are in an elite form of service but occupy different stratifications of the elite female servant hierarchy.

⁹² Sir Thomas Wilson, *The State of England, Anno Dom. 1600*, ed. J. Fisher Camden Miscellany. vol. xvi (London: Camden Society, 1936), p. 29. As quoted in Charlotte Merton, unpublished thesis, ‘The women who served Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth: Ladies, Gentlewomen and Maids of the Privy Chamber, 1553 to 1603’ (University of Cambridge, 1992), pp. 18-19.

⁹³ The queen’s household also included chambermaids and maidservants, but these women performed domestic service.

The highest elite female servant position an unmarried woman could hold was as a maid of honour.⁹⁴ These women, who under different queens were either from noble or gentry families, were placed in the queen's service with the expectation that service would aid and present them opportunity in terms of marriage.⁹⁵ Richard Smith's 1627 account of Lady Magdalen's admission to court describes her amongst the 'noble wayting-women (who are vsually called Ladyes of Honour)', and further illustrates the 'Court of England ... [as] a schoole of virtue, a nursery of purity, a mansion of piety'.⁹⁶ Maids of honour were defined by their virtue and unmarried status, and, as I detailed above, were in service for a wifely education, learning both how to serve and how to be mistress.

To be a waiting gentlewoman, either at court or in a great household, one had to hold the social title of 'gentlewoman'. This was the highest position an unmarried female servant could occupy in a household outside of a courtly setting. It is my understanding that most women in service in great households were likely somewhat economically dependent on their service position, even if they held an elite social title.⁹⁷ In an emerging capitalist economy, one could be born with status but be financially dependent on one's service position. In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Olivia's waiting gentlewoman, Maria, constructs a revenge plot against the steward,

⁹⁴ Although the term 'ladies-in-waiting' is often employed to define the queen's women, the first recorded usage of this term was in 1703. Historians of the early modern period now generally apply it to describe the queen's women. However, because it is not an early modern term, I will avoid it. See 'lady-in-waiting, n.1', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press < www.oed.com/view/Entry/273115 > [Accessed 25 November 2021].

⁹⁵ In Helen Payne's unpublished thesis, she details how 'Queen Anne's Maids of Honour were, with one exception, drawn from gentry families' (p. 13). Most of these women in Queen Elizabeth's household were from noble or aristocratic families.

⁹⁶ Richard Smith, *The Life of the most Honourable and Vertuous Lady the Lady Magdalen Viscountesse Montague* (1627), A4r.

⁹⁷ Little scholarship exists on the economic position and wages of elite female servants within gentry or noble households. There is some evidence that women at court who served in the bedchamber or privy chamber were paid. Maids of honour, it seems, may have received some sums but were more so remunerated with room, board, and, ultimately, marriage. Whereas maidservants and chambermaids worked for wages and regularly moved households (see Hubbard), elite female servants remained in one household and were rewarded for their service with marriage.

Malvolio. Upon hearing her plan, Sir Toby exclaims, ‘I could marry this wench for this device [...] [a]nd ask no other dowry with her but such another jest’ (2.5.176-9). Although Maria’s economic situation is not discussed throughout the play, in this line, Sir Toby suggests that she may not have a dowry and therefore, the richness of her wit serves as its substitute. It is ultimately Maria’s wit that allows for her revenge plot to play out successfully.

Wit is in fact a defining characteristic of a waiting gentlewoman. As Castiglione’s ‘Chief Conditions and Qualities of a Waiting Gentlewoman’ outlines, other than being well born, a waiting gentlewoman must also be skilled in reading, writing and arithmetic, and be witty.⁹⁸ A waiting gentlewoman’s wit, and more specifically, the ‘lively quickness of [her] wit’, becomes a key characteristic of her position.⁹⁹ Maria employs such qualities to create her ‘device’ – that is, her revenge against Malvolio:

For Monsieur Malvolio, let me alone with him. If I do not gull him into a nayword and make him a common recreation, do not think I have wit enough to lie straight in my bed. I know I can do it. (2.3.130-133)

Maria parades her elite skills and status as she disguises her hand as her mistress’s. In early modern England, women were trained to write through the practice of imitation. Hannah Woolley’s *The Complete Servant-Maid* (1670) offers women in service practical advice to succeed in their specific service roles, advocating for proficiency in literacy and writing in elite positions. She advises women to copy example texts to study writing and to practice the art of mimicking.¹⁰⁰ Although Woolley reminds her reader to be submissive in her practice of writing and ‘arithmetick’ -- ‘[h]aving learned [this] [...] you must remember to be [...] humble and submissive’ – in *Twelfth Night*, Maria discovers agency and authority through her literacy skills

⁹⁸ Castiglione, Zz3r.

⁹⁹ Castiglione, Zz3r.

¹⁰⁰ Woolley, *The Complete Servant Maid* (London, 1670), B9r-B10v.

and rhetorical manipulation.¹⁰¹ She successfully deceives Malvolio in her literal attempt to mimic her mistress's hand. Dowd notes that '[t]he 'hand' of a woman like Maria [...] articulated her character, ability and even independence'.¹⁰² The skills expected of Maria as a waiting gentlewoman were aimed at creating an ideal, submissive servant, yet she (and various other elite female servants in early modern drama) wields them to upend hierarchical household and social structures.

The term 'waiting woman' was a more general title to describe a woman in elite service. This position implied one of two definitions: the waiting woman either held the same position and duties as a waiting gentlewoman without the social title of a 'gentlewoman', or in a larger household, the waiting woman was second to a waiting gentlewoman. Waiting women were unmarried and untitled. Gouge presents a negative illustration of waiting women in his discussion of 'Arrogancy', which he describes as a vice contrary to the 'reverence of a servant's speech':

Clerkes, prentises, waiting women, and such like, being borne of gentlemen, and men of good degree, are for the most part guilty of this fault [arrogancy]: the reason is, because their birth and parentage maketh them forget their present place and condition; or else (which is worse) maketh them wilfully presume about it.¹⁰³

Gouge acknowledges that servants born to the gentry may speak or act out against their place, either presuming themselves to be above their household position or forgetting their subordinate place. This appears as a repetitive theme in descriptions of waiting women. Burnett details how '[i]n 1611 the Common Council in London ruled against those waiting-women and chambermaids who flouted the sumptuary laws by parading in large ruffs, lace trimmings, fine

¹⁰¹ Woolley, *The Complete Servant Maid*, B2v.

¹⁰² Dowd, p. 116.

¹⁰³ Gouge, Qq5r.

petticoats and fancy aprons and ribbons'.¹⁰⁴ The fear that servants would usurp their position or seek to advance themselves, thus creating household and social disorder, is a common anxiety presented in early modern drama. For example, in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* – a play which I will return to in Chapter Two – Diaphanta, the waiting woman, agrees to participate in her mistress's bed trick to acquire a dowry and achieve social mobility. At the end of the play, when Diaphanta does not follow through with the arranged agreement, DeFlores mocks Beatrice Joanna for entrusting her servant with an important task: 'Who'd trust / A waiting woman?' (5.1.14-15).¹⁰⁵ Because marriage marked the end to the service contract, elite female servants are often depicted as ambitious and craving advancement: this negative portrayal draws from social anxieties of this position in the period.

Waiting women existed at the bottom of the elite female servant hierarchy, bordering on association with lower ranking servants such as chambermaids and maidservants. Woolley specifies that anyone below the title of a waiting woman was considered to be 'lower ranking'.¹⁰⁶ Titles such as 'chambermaid' or 'maidservant' therefore do not describe elite women in service. Robert Cleaver's *A godlie forme of householde gouernment* (1598) describes 'the conditions of a good maid-servant' as 'diligent in an household, and haue skill in washing, brewing, sowing, and spinning'.¹⁰⁷ In Woolley's *The Gentlewoman's Companion* (1670), she details a chambermaid's duty to a 'person of quality' – 'you may be able to supply the place of the Waiting-woman, should she chance to fall sick, or be absent from your Lady; you must wash fine Linnen well; and starch Tiffanies, Lawns Points, and Laces, mend them neatly; and wash white Sarcenets,

¹⁰⁴ Burnett, p. 127.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, ed. Michael Neill (London, New York: Methuen Drama, 2019).

¹⁰⁶ Woolley, D6v.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Cleaver, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Gouernment* (London, 1598), p. 381.

with such like things'; this contrasts with the duties expected of a chambermaid to 'a gentlewoman in city or country': 'it will be required that you wash and starch very well both Tiffanies, Lawns, Points and Laces, and that you can mend what is amiss in them [...] Keep your Mistresses Chamber clean, and lay up every thing in its due place'.¹⁰⁸ These women served the domestic household's needs of cleaning, sewing, and cooking. Yet, as Woolley's descriptions of these social stratifications show, early modern female households had clear hierarchical structures which were established so that if one stratification was missing, another took its place, thus always ensuring order.

Specific terminology therefore informs an audience of a character's social status, details to which an early modern audience, whose culture was rooted in ideas of strict hierarchy, would be more sensitive than we are as modern readers or audience members. In the case that a female servant's position is not assigned, my methodology for determining a character's position is simple: I examine the status of her mistress and of the household in which she serves as well as her proximity to and interactions with her mistress. If an elite female servant tends to her mistress's corporeal body and takes an active interest in her affairs – be it as a companion offering advice, by dressing her mistress and physically interacting with her body, or by participating in her mistress's business – then I define her as an elite female servant. If the mistress holds a social title like 'lady' or 'duchess', or if her household is of the gentry or higher, and the elite female servant interacts directly with her mistress's body, then we can assume the female servant holds an elite position.

¹⁰⁸ Hannah Woolley, *The Gentlewoman's Companion* (London, 1670), O8r – P2r.

For example, in Fletcher's *The Pilgrim* (1621), Juletta is an untitled female servant. She serves Alinda (a gentleman's daughter) and attends to her mistress's physical and emotional needs. When Alinda instructs her to '[t]ake this Key and fetch me/ The Marygold Jewel that lies in my little Cabinet', Juletta is entrusted with access to her mistress's intimate belongings (2.1.175).¹⁰⁹ When Alinda's father learns his daughter has run away, he questions her servant – 'Why lay you from her?' – to which she replies: 'It was her will I should: she is my Mistress / And my part is obedience' (2.1.40-1). Juletta even has the authority to speak her mind as she informs her master: 'I think she [Alinda] is weary of your tyranny' (2.1.52). These are not the actions of a lower ranking servant, but rather of one with high social status and a clear place in the household. If a female servant's position or social status is not given, we can rely on examining the household she serves in, her actions (whether they represent elite or domestic service), and her spatial proximity to her mistress to designate whether she fits into the elite female servant category.

It is the aim of this thesis to read female servants through the lens of social status in order to notice the nuances and varying stratifications of women in service in early modern drama. Considering the importance of a specific title for an elite female servant ensures that critics, readers, and actors understand a character's position within social and household dynamics. For example, in *Twelfth Night*, Maria is, according to the text, a waiting gentlewoman. When Olivia instructs Malvolio to '[c]all in my gentlewoman', she cements Maria's elite female servant position (1.5.158). Understanding Maria's elite social position explains why, when Cesario/Viola enters to find both Olivia and Maria veiled, they ask, 'The honourable lady of the house, which is

¹⁰⁹ John Fletcher, *The Pilgrim*, ed. Cyrus Hoy, in *The Dramatic Works in The Beaumont and Fletcher Canon* Vol. VI, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

she?’ (1.5.163). It is because of Maria’s elite status that she could, reasonably, be mistaken for her mistress. Similarly, Margaret in *Much Ado About Nothing*, is also described as the ‘waiting gentlewoman to Hero’ (2.2.12-13). Margaret embodies the waiting gentlewoman’s qualities (elite, unmarried, witty) and duties (dressing and sleeping with her mistress) throughout the play. It is because of Margaret’s position as Hero’s waiting gentlewoman that Borachio can devise his plot, in which Margaret is mistaken for Hero at her chamber window. Understanding the terminology associated with female servant positions creates a clearer picture of hierarchical structures and household dynamics within early modern drama. This thesis is a call to editors and critics alike to employ accurate and consistent terminology, which will allow readers to properly understand the status of female characters and their place in their own narratives.¹¹⁰ Having a greater awareness of the terminology and of the place of elite female servants in early modern England allows us to read the drama of the period in a new light, with fuller awareness of the tensions within the household, on which playwrights capitalise.

Thesis Overview

The four chapters of this thesis analyse how social constructions of status, alongside those of gender, race, and sexuality, form an elite female servant’s identity. It is not my intention to construct a monolithic figure, but rather to draw attention to the nuances and paradoxes which shape elite female servants across early modern drama. In this thesis, I situate elite female

¹¹⁰ For example, Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-8) is presented across editions as ‘waiting woman’ (Arden 3), ‘lady-in-waiting’ (Cambridge), ‘waiting-maid’ (Penguin Classics), and ‘Portia’s gentlewoman’ (Oxford Shakespeare). The 1637 third quarto was the first text to assign Nerissa the title of ‘waiting gentlewoman’. The status of her mistress and her own actions as she participates in Portia’s affairs make it clear that Nerissa is a waiting gentlewoman. Although the Oxford Shakespeare is correct in defining her as ‘Portia’s gentlewoman’, the range of terminology across editions allows for misinterpretation in scholarship and performance. See: William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, The Arden Third Series, ed. John Drakakis (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2011); *The Merchant of Venice*, Cambridge School Shakespeare 4th Edition, ed. Rob Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. W. Moelwyn (London: Penguin Classics, 2015); *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Oxford: Oxford Shakespeare, 2008); William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 3rd Quarto (1637), BL C.34.k.24, A1r.

servants within the context of social constructions of identity. Although the performative identity of these characters is rendered more complex by aspects of early modern performance, such as the conditions of the boy actors playing them or female audiences in attendance, the attention of this thesis focuses instead on how playwrights fashioned the elite female servant identity through characters on stage.

The first chapter analyses the temporal nature of ‘waiting’ and the concept of ‘waiting’ as a form of service. Waiting, it seems, is a state of opposition, defined as both an action and a state of postponement. It is also used to describe the position an elite female servant might hold – as a *waiting* woman or *waiting* gentlewoman – and it notably describes the “service life cycle” as elite female servants wait for marriage. In this chapter, I initially draw on Derrida’s deconstructive work to construct a temporal definition of waiting so it may then be applied to waiting in service. Service was conceptualised as a period of socially imposed delay in which women were forced to wait on another woman in service, while waiting for their future to transpire (marriage). This chapter aims to rethink elite female servants not just as characters whose sole purpose is to provide for those they serve, but as characters who strive to shape their own future. By examining elite female servants in a range of early modern plays, but specifically in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Henry VIII* (1613) and Fletcher’s later solo piece, *A Wife for a Month* (1624), I scrutinise how waiting occurs and the ways in which waiting can annul or fortify a woman’s desired future. I argue that elite female servants claim agency and resistance through waiting as they capitalise on service’s temporal limitations.

While Chapter One rethinks a woman’s experience within the “service life cycle”, Chapter Two considers how elite female servants endeavour to leave service by engaging in networks of exchange, be it economic, sexual or political. I examine Middleton and Rowley’s

The Changeling (1622) and Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* (1603-4) to probe the connection between status, sexuality, and the economy in female service. My focus on the plays' exchanges, specifically instances of commodity and sexual exchanges (like the bed trick trope), underscores how elite female servants occupy a fraught position within the early modern economy as both objects of exchange and as elite women with agency. Juxtaposing Diaphanta in *The Changeling* with Helen in *All's Well* highlights the complex dynamics of female status in service and the ways in which elite female servants are valued within the emerging capitalist economy. I argue that it is through networks of exchange and by negotiating and manipulating their perceived worth that elite female servants are able to participate in a nascent capitalist economy and achieve social mobility.

Chapter Three adopts an intersectional approach to examine the interplay between race, gender, and status as represented in the figure of the elite Black female servant in early modern English drama.¹¹¹ Looking at the portrayal of elite Black female servants in John Webster's *The White Devil* (1612), John Fletcher's *The Knight of Malta* (1618), and William Percy's largely forgotten manuscript, *A Forrest Tragedye in Vacunium* (1602?), exemplifies the nuances and paradoxes attached to this figure. Split into three sections, this chapter first analyses how the Black female servant is metaphorically conceived as both an elite female servant and as a slave

¹¹¹ In choosing to call these characters "Black female servants", I follow Kimberlé Crenshaw's methodology. Crenshaw states: 'I capitalize "Black" because "Blacks, like Asians, Latinos, and other 'minorities,' constitute a specific cultural group and, as such, require denotation as a proper noun [...] By the same token, I do not capitalize "white," which is not a proper noun, since whites do not constitute a specific cultural group'. Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, July 1991, Vol. 43, no. 6 (Stanford Law Review, 1991), pp. 1241-1299, p. 1244, footnote 6. I choose not to call these characters "Moorish maidservants" or "Blackamoor maids", because these terms suggest both a geographical association and a specific service status. I also, notably, use 'white' in the lower case to refer to phenotype. For a definition of 'moor' see Nandini Das's *Keywords of Identity, Race, and Human Mobility in Early Modern England*, eds. Nandini Das, João Vicente Melo, Haig Z. Smith, and Lauren Working (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021); Ambereen Dadabhoy, 'Barbarian moors: Documenting Racial Formation in Early Modern England' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 30-46, p. 34.

in early modern drama; it then examines how the language of these three plays place colour at the nexus of identity within mistress-servant relationships; finally, it considers how visible interracial relationships between elite Black female servants and white men challenge models of kinship within the early modern household. My focus in this chapter is not directed at the historical, lived experience of elite Black female servants but rather at how this figure is depicted across a broader economy of service in early modern drama.¹¹² I argue that playwrights yoke anxieties of blackness with anxieties about elite female servants to fashion the identity of racialised female servants.

In the final chapter, I demonstrate how considerations of social status – and specifically the social status of female service – can affect our understanding of two of Shakespeare’s most critically discussed female characters who perform acts of service: Emilia in *Othello* (1604) and Paulina in *The Winter’s Tale* (1610). Unlike the elite female servants explored in the previous three chapters, Paulina and Emilia are anomalous characters precisely because they are married. Shakespeare’s inclusion of Emilia in the play as a ‘non-elite’ servant to multiple masters complicates the actions she takes and enhances the plot. Her failure to enact good and loyal service, as I will show, is shaped by her social status. On the other hand, Paulina’s obviously elite status allows her to perform extraordinary acts of service while not identifying as a servant. By placing Paulina in conversation with Emilia, I draw attention to the intertextual connections between the women in both plays. Doing so, I argue, allows for a more nuanced reading of these characters and a more developed understanding of status and service in these popular plays and across early modern English drama. This thesis’s methodology primarily assumes a readership

¹¹² For a comprehensive study, see Imtiaz Habib’s *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677: imprints of the invisible* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008).

rather than an audience for drama.¹¹³ However, as Pascale Aebischer suggests, ‘bodies that are marginalised in play texts and literary criticism may come centerstage in performance and performance studies’, and it is for this reason that I turn, in the final chapter, to survey the ways in which female servant characters have been staged in contemporary London productions.¹¹⁴ Looking to modern performances allows me to consider how depictions of servant identities on the stage, as well as on the page, can alter an audience’s or reader’s understanding of status and power dynamics within the narrative.

The focus on elite female servants and intricate social constructions of identity in these chapters also reveals the ways in which we have misread certain characters in early modern drama. Scholars have been quick to dismiss elite female servant characters without understanding the range of possibilities encompassed by the idea of female service. David Evett, for example, has argued:

Shakespeare strongly suggests that women know, somehow, how service ought to work. Whether that knowledge is innate or learned is not easy to discern. When Shakespeare discusses service directly, it is always in conjunction with male servants: the female characters take it all for granted.¹¹⁵

This misguided assumption limits the scope of how we read and interpret female servant characters. To suggest women naturally know how service should work, does not allow for us to consider how playwrights utilised elite female servant roles to draw attention to household, gendered and social tensions. Evett’s claim is not unique nor surprising, given the little

¹¹³ See Lukas Erne’s *Shakespeare as a Literary Dramatist* for a detailed study of Shakespeare not only as writer for the stage, but also as a literary dramatist who produced texts for readership. Although I primarily look at playwrights as literary dramatists, in Chapter Four, I consider the plays within a performance context. Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as a Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹¹⁴ Pascale Aebischer, *Shakespeare’s Violated Bodies: Stage and Screen Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 5. I primarily focus on London-based, twenty-first century performances in this thesis because that is what was available online during the covid pandemic.

¹¹⁵ Evett, p. 161

scholarship we have on various female servant roles. This thesis, therefore, intervenes in scholarship on three different levels. Firstly, it recognises the nuances of specific characters by examining the variety of social status identities attached to female servant characters in early modern drama. It also acknowledges the limitations of the work literary scholars of service have produced to date, work which often homogenises these characters, and seems unaware of the intricacies and stratifications within elite female service. It is these intricacies which this thesis distinguishes, and which breathe new life into our understanding of early modern drama more broadly. Lastly, it challenges us to rethink how status, gender, race, sexuality, and service operated in early modern English society. By reimagining elite female servant characters within early modern English drama, this thesis recognises the agency these characters have, as well as their significance to our understanding of the ways in which playwrights depicted their social world on the early modern stage.

Chapter One: Waiting in Service: Temporality and Elite Female Service in Early Modern English Drama

At the end of William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (1597), the Princess and her elite female servants assert authority over their suitors through the temporal process of waiting. After receiving the men's ludicrous and 'mocking' love letters, Rosaline swears that if she knew Berowne were truly besotted with her, she would 'torture' him: 'How I would make him fawn, and beg, and seek, / And wait the season, and observe the times [...] So pair-taunt-like would I o'ersway his state, / That he should be my fool, and I his fate' (5.2.59-68).¹ Rosaline declares that she would dominate Berowne by imposing waiting on him, and it is this decree that the women thereafter assert over the men. Following the Princess's sudden announcement that she and her women will leave court due to the unexpected death of her father, the King hastily pressures the women to marry:

The extreme parts of time extremely forms
All causes to the purpose of his speed
And often at his very loose decides
That which long process could not arbitrate.
And though the mourning brow of progeny
Forbid the smiling courtesy of love
The holy suit which fain it would convince,
Yet, since love's argument was first on foot,
Let not the cloud of sorrow jostle it
From what it purposed

(5.2.734-743)

With little time left before the women depart, the King claims that it is time which forces decisions to be made quickly; rather than entering a period of mourning, he suggests the women marry. The Princess, doubting his sincerity, defers the King's marriage proposal for the duration

¹ William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, The Arden Third Series, ed. H. R. Woudhuysen (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 1998). All subsequent references will be to this version unless otherwise noted.

of a year, and her maids of honour subsequently follow suit. This postponement allows the women to try the men’s resolve: to test whether these proposals were made in earnest or in jest.

As the Princess dismisses the King’s offer, she draws attention to the temporal nature and permanence of the marriage bond – a commitment which she suggests, should not made in haste:

King Now at the last minute of the hour
 Grant us your loves.
Princess A time, methinks, too short
 To make a world-without-end bargain in.
 (5.2.781-3)

In challenging the men to remove themselves ‘to some forlorn and naked hermitage, / Remote from all the pleasures of the world’, the verity of their ‘offer made in heat of blood’ will undergo trial during the waiting period (5.2.789-90). Refusing these perfunctory proposals allows the Princess and her ladies to maintain their independence through the process of deferral and effectively to determine their own futures, to a certain extent. The *OED* defines ‘deferral’ or ‘to defer’ as ‘to put off (action, procedure) to some later time; to delay, postpone’.² Deferral is an action in which one can independently choose to wait out or resist performing an immediate action. The deferral of marriage allows the elite female servants – Rosaline, Katherine, and Maria – to maintain some independence in a female-centred household for a while longer. Service, as I discussed in the Introduction, is a liminal, in-between period in a woman’s life, and marriage marked its ending. The service contract itself was predicated on the future-focused promise of marriage as a reward for service. Although marriage offered a woman social advancement and the authority to be mistress of her own household, it simultaneously removed her independence and her legal identity. Whereas marriage denies a woman her individual status

² ‘defer, v. 2a’, *OED Online*, Oxford English Dictionary < www.oed.com/view/Entry/48814 > [Accessed 02.03.2023].

through the doctrine of coverture, I suggest service allows women to retain some scope of personal agency.³ There are of course instances, which I will later discuss in this chapter, when marriage would be preferable to perpetual service; however, elite female servants frequently claim agency through their service position, acquiring some independence which marriage would certainly deny. When Katherine instructs Dumaine to ‘[c]ome when the King doth to my lady come; / Then, if I have much love I’ll give you some’, she defers the immediate action of marriage and instead chooses to remain in her mistress’s service (5.2.817-18). The women’s resistance to neat conclusions challenges the men’s conventional and heteronormative expectations of a linear futurity.⁴

I begin this chapter with the final scene of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, an inconclusive ending which refuses to acknowledge whether the marriage promise will be fulfilled or not, in order to draw attention to the temporal restrictions of elite female service in early modern England. Service was designed to postpone a young person’s entrance into adulthood and was therefore a period of socially imposed delay. For women, specifically for elite women, it was a period of expected inaction, in which a woman would passively and patiently wait for marriage.⁵ However, as the drama of the period shows, it was through this period that women were frequently

³ For further scholarship on coverture laws, see Mendelson and Crawford’s *Women in Early Modern England: 1550-1720* (p. 124), and Laura Gowing’s *Gender Relations* (see pp. 44-6).

⁴ This chapter in many ways draws from ideas of queer temporal theory, which challenges ideologies that the future was tied to procreation in heteronormative relationships by resisting a linear narrative. Early modern queer temporal theory is concerned with looking beyond the binary of past and future in a linear sense and recognises how temporality defines characters and their positions in literature of the period. For more on this, see Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Freeman (ed.), ‘Queer Temporalities’ in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 13, Issue 2-3, June 2007; Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (ed.), *Gendered Temporalities in the Early Modern World* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Erin Murphy, ‘Erotic Origins: Genesis, the Passion, and Aemelia Lanyer’s Queer Temporality’ in *World-Making Renaissance Women: Rethinking Early Modern Women’s Place in Literature and Culture*, eds. Pamela S. Hammons and Brandie R. Siegfried (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 19-36.

⁵ See Chapter Three, ‘Childhood and Adolescence’ in Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford’s *Women in Early Modern England: 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) for a historical context of female service in early modern England.

empowered to act and to construct their own narrative. Although we often think of waiting to be a passive state, I suggest that waiting is an active, oppositional state, in which both actions and delays occur. In this chapter, I undertake a theoretical analysis of waiting to argue that elite female servants claim agency and resistance through waiting by proactively exploiting service's temporal subjectification and liminalities.

Although scholars have not yet considered the temporal nature of service, several critics have attended to temporal concepts of delay, gender, and perceptions of time in early modern English literature: concepts which are central to shaping the framework of this chapter. Scholarship of the past twenty years has progressed towards understanding time as a cultural construct – much like gender, sexuality, and race – and temporality as a defining factor of identity. While scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s focused on what Jonathan Gil Harris describes as the study of Time ‘with a capital “T”’, a more literal and linear interpretation of temporal studies, recent criticism has considered the multi-faceted, flexible, and ‘dynamic’ perceptions of time.⁶ The focus on temporality has come to the forefront of early modern studies in recent years, merging pasts, presents, and futures to highlight the unstable and nonlinear progression of time as it was conceptualised in the early modern period. J.K. Barret's *Untold Futures*, for example, examines ideas of the future and the past in early modern literature to argue that a multiplicity of futures results in a temporal unease.⁷ Her work on the futurity of the

⁶ Recent scholarship on temporality and its multifaceted and polychronic nature includes: Jonathan Gil Harris, ‘Untimely Meditations’ in *Early Modern Culture: An Electronic Seminar 6* (2007), paragraphs 2 & 4; Matthew Wagner, *Shakespeare, Theatre, Time* (London: Routledge, 2012); Amy Boesky, ‘Giving Time to Women: The Eternising Project in Early Modern England’ in *This Double Voice: Gendered Writing in Early Modern England*, eds. Danielle Clarke and Elizabeth Clarke (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 123-41; Lauren Shohet (ed.), *Temporality, Genre and Experience in the Age of Shakespeare: Forms of Time* (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2018).

⁷ J.K. Barret, *Untold Futures: Time and Literary Culture in Renaissance England* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2016).

promise is of immense help in understanding the promise of marriage within the service contract. In elite female service, the promise of marriage appears as a certainty and is frequently regarded as attainable and within grasp, but, as we will see, the promise is never absolute and even temporarily withholds the completion of the obligation.

The interplay between temporal concepts of delay and gender are of further importance to the study of time and temporality in the early modern field, as well as to the consideration of temporality in elite female service. Patricia Parker's influential work on 'delay' and 'dilation' deconstructs capital 'T' Time to analyse how cultural constructs of temporality defined gendered identities in early modern England. In describing delay as a component of early modern ideas of 'dilation', she suggests 'dilation' was understood to be a 'combination of temporal deferral and spatial extension', not only defined as 'to expand, disperse' but also as 'to put off, postpone, prolong'.⁸ Parker's work seeks to show how early moderns implicitly connect time with space. What is significant and central to this chapter is how she recognises temporal aspects of gender. Parker suggests that men and male authority were often depicted as temporally active, whereas women and female subversion were associated with delay and passivity. This applies to the temporal construct of early modern service, in that elite female servants were subjected to social delay and expected to patiently and passively wait in service for marriage. Yet, as we see in *Love's Labour's Lost* and various other early modern plays, women claim authority through delay. Parker describes this, the 'deferral of consummation' as a 'specifically feminine plot' which obstructs male satisfaction.⁹ In presenting delay as a feminine strategy, Parker draws attention to the political and gendered nature of time and space in the early modern period.

⁸ Patricia Parker, 'Dilation and Delay: Renaissance Matrices' in *Poetics Today: Medieval and Renaissance Representation: New Reflections* 5.3 (1984), pp. 519-35, p. 520.

⁹ Parker, p. 528.

Sarah Lewis's recent monograph draws on Parker's foundational arguments to analyse intersections of temporal theories and gendered identities in early modern culture and literature, arguing that these concepts must be read in relation to one another.¹⁰ In particular, her work on patience, prodigality, and revenge highlights the simultaneous assertion and deconstruction of the binary opposition between action and delay in the drama of the period. Lewis argues that 'actions can work to delay and delays can be defined by action'.¹¹ I apply this concept to elite female service in order to investigate how the cultural construct of service works to delay women, yet through delay and various models of waiting, elite female servants can discover agency. Intersecting temporal studies with service studies is productive for our understanding of the framework of service, and the ways in which the temporal experience of waiting can shape an elite female servant's service experience as they wait upon a mistress. Service paradoxically complicates the natural linear progression of a woman's life, as it purposefully delays her from progressing towards marriage, and yet it is also considered to be part of the natural linear progression of a woman's life, preparing her for marriage. Early modern drama, as I will show, portrays numerous instances of elite female servants capitalising on this period of socially imposed delay to achieve their desired future.

In this chapter, I first analyse the temporal concept of waiting so that I can then apply it to the temporal development of elite service in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII, or All is True* (1613) and Fletcher's *A Wife for a Month* (1624).¹² The concept of waiting serves as a

¹⁰ Sarah Lewis, *Time and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

¹¹ Lewis, *Time and Gender*, p. 8.

¹² William Shakespeare and John Fletcher, *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, The Arden Third Series, ed. Gordon McMullan (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2000). John Fletcher, *A Wife for a Month*, ed. Robert Kean Turner, in *The Dramatic Works in The Beaumont and Fletcher Canon Vol. VI*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). All subsequent references will be to these versions unless otherwise noted.

productive lens for scrutinising elite female service as it allows us to examine the active and inactive nature of this liminal period in a woman's life. Through engagement with Derrida's work on waiting (*s'attendre*), the future (*future* and *l'avenir*), and the in-between (*différance*), I analyse the temporality of the service contract and the ways in which service is inextricably linked to the future-oriented promise of marriage. In this section, I identify four modes of waiting – passive waiting, active waiting, imposed waiting, and self-imposed waiting – which allows me to consider how waiting in service both enables and hinders women from achieving their ambitions. I suggest the flexible and temporal boundaries of elite female service are often used against the women as a means of control, yet it is through these liminal and fluid frameworks and through different modes of waiting that the women can find some resistance. Derrida's deconstructive criticism resonates throughout this thesis in that he not only forces us to reconsider conclusive and assumed meanings or endings – in this case, the determined ending of service – but he also encourages exploration of the negotiations and complications that occur within set binaries.

This theoretical work on waiting lays a foundation for me to closely examine elite female service comparatively in *Henry VIII* and *A Wife for a Month*. There are obvious parallels to be drawn between the two plays, as in both a King seeks to divorce his Queen for her younger maid of honour, but there are also important differences, particularly in terms of the way the plays engage with time and gender in service. The narrative of *Henry VIII* focuses on the divorce proceedings between Henry and Katherine, highlighting Henry's obsession with succession and his pursuit of Katherine's maid of honour, Anne Boleyn. The elite female servants – Anne Boleyn, the aptly named Patience (Queen Katherine's woman) and, I suggest, the Old Lady – are all forced to confront socially imposed temporal boundaries. The plot of *A Wife for a Month*,

however, is centered on the maid of honour, Evanthe, who must navigate the temporal impositions King Frederick, Valerio (her betrothed), and Cassandra (her older waiting gentlewoman) enforce upon her. Analysing the thematic and temporal similarities between these two plays through the elite female servants highlights the ways in which the institution of service is designed to limit women's agency, and the ways in which they claim resistance by manipulating these same restrictions. Scholarship has not explored the clear correlations between these two plays, nor has it considered how Fletcher's solo piece looks back to and even parodies his earlier collaboration with Shakespeare. Both *Henry VIII* and *A Wife for a Month* prove to be productive case studies for analysing the interplay between temporality, gender, and service as they demonstrate how the temporal ambiguities of service leave room for elite female servants to actively change their current state. In undertaking analysis of these plays in line with the foundational arguments this thesis makes about elite female service, I propose that reading elite female servants through the framework of temporality enables us to better understand how status and service converge with social constructions of gender and sexuality to shape the individual identity of elite female servant characters. I argue that the flexible temporal framework of elite female service is used against the women in both plays, and yet it is through such a framework and the waiting it necessitates, that they find the potential to achieve their ambitions.

A Theoretical Framework of Waiting

The word 'waiting' derives from the Anglo-French *waitier*, 'to watch'.¹³ From the 13th century, 'waiting' was defined as 'to watch with hostile intent', 'to lie in wait for', and 'to plot' against.¹⁴ 'Waiting' is clearly an active state: one actively waits 'with hostile intent', one actively 'lies in

¹³ 'wait, v.1', *OED Online*, Oxford English Dictionary < www.oed.com/view/Entry/225136 > [Accessed 23.03.2023].

¹⁴ 'wait, v.1a,1b', *OED Online*, Oxford English Dictionary < www.oed.com/view/Entry/226076 > [Accessed 02.03.2023].

wait for' something to occur, and one most definitely actively 'plot[s] against'.¹⁵ Yet, it concurrently appears to be defined by a state of postponement, preventing the future from becoming the present moment. Waiting, it seems, is a complicated temporal concept, a state of opposition defined by both action and inaction.¹⁶ Waiting as a form of service is also puzzling: it both encourages an elite female servant to look toward the future – the expectation of what is to come (marriage) – and to patiently accept her current state and not actively seek out an expected future. The service contract itself is a temporal bond, focused on a future which remains uncertain. Scrutiny of waiting prompts this question, central to the framework of this chapter: is waiting defined by the events that occur during the period of waiting (the in-between) or by what one is waiting for (the end goal or conclusion)? Analysing the temporal nature of waiting allows me to then probe what literary scholars of service have not yet considered: whether service is defined by the events that occur during this period of waiting or if service is defined by its end goal of marriage.

In order to construct a definition of waiting so that it may then be applied to waiting in service, I draw upon Derrida's deconstruction of the temporal concepts, *différance* and *s'attendre*. Derrida defines *différance* as such:

The verb 'to differ' [différer] seems to differ from itself. On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible. Sometimes the different and sometimes the deferred correspond [in French] to the verb 'to differ'.¹⁷

¹⁵ 'Waiting' as an adjective (waiting-woman) was not used until the mid-16th century and is often attached to servant identities. Interestingly, the phrase 'to wait something out' – the temporal experience of delay – was not used until 1849.

¹⁶ Both Lewis and Barret have considered waiting within the context of Christ's Second Coming.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 129. As quoted in Lewis, *Time and Gender*, p. 9.

Through deconstructing the dual meanings of the French verb ‘différer’ as both a kind of difference and a kind of deferral, Derrida looks between the literal word and its definition to suggest that words and signifiers defer meaning and can only be defined through that from which they differ. *Différance*, as Derrida demonstrates, is ‘neither simply active nor simply passive’, but rather ‘between the active and the passive’.¹⁸ It is this ‘middle voice’, ‘the opposition between passivity and activity’ that I will build upon in my analysis of waiting.¹⁹ Waiting occupies a liminal space between activity and passivity. Derrida’s dissection of *s’attendre*, on the other hand, interrogates the literal definition of waiting. In his *Aporias*, he both considers and critiques Heidegger’s notion of waiting within the context of waiting for death or waiting for an ending. Derrida deconstructs *s’attendre* into three defining determinants: (1) one can ‘await oneself’, (2) we can wait for some other – ‘one can and must wait for something else, hence expect some other – as when one is said to expect that something will happen or that some other arrive’, and (3) ‘we can wait for each other’.²⁰ Throughout Derrida’s analysis, he draws attention to the modes of waiting, specifically the ‘anxious anticipation of something’ and the ‘not yet (*pas encore*)’, suggesting that it is the “not yet” that bends us toward death, the expecting and waiting’ for the unknown future.²¹ I draw on the ‘anxious anticipation’ and the ‘not yet’ of something arriving as I consider the uncertainty associated with waiting and marriage in service, and the ways in which the future for elite female servants is temporally non-linear.

I propose that waiting falls ‘between the active and the passive’ and can be defined as both an expectation of a future action and as an action in itself. Waiting disrupts any temporal linear progression as it defers action from occurring in expectation of a future that is to come. At

¹⁸ Jaques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982), p. 9.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 130.

²⁰ Jaques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 65.

²¹ Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 69.

the same time, that unknown future (and subsequent ending) can change the way one waits. In a medical study on waiting and wait times, Florian Klapproth writes, '[s]omeone who waits prepares himself for events which shall happen in the future. The only barrier which separates the waiting person from an event which he is waiting for is time. And usually, the waiting person does also experience this time as a barrier. Waiting, therefore, results from being constrained by time'.²² Klapproth describes waiting to be a temporal constraint, but as I will show, it can also be conceptualised as a period of liberation. It is in this temporal lacuna in which service occurs, and the ways in which elite female servants choose to wait affect their coming futures.

There are two elements that I consider in my categorisation of waiting: time and the enforcer. The enforcer is the person who determines the waiting period – either I can choose to wait or someone can make me wait. If the bus is late, then it forces me to wait, but if the bus is on time and I decide to wait for the next one in order to enjoy the rare English sun, then I choose to wait and defer action from progressing. As Leonard Lawlor observes in his analysis of Derrida's *Aporias*, '[t]he verb *s'attendre* can be interpreted as both transitive and reflexive'.²³ Waiting is an action which one person can do to another (transitive), or which the person performing the action is also the person receiving the action (reflexive). In elite female service, the household one serves in has the power to enforce the period of waiting which elite female servants can either accept or resist. The temporal experience of the elite female servant is not only the indefinite or fixed period of waiting but also how waiting occurs: either a passive acceptance of the waiting period, or an active haste to end it. In analysing the four modes of waiting – passive waiting, active waiting, imposed waiting, and self-imposed waiting – I draw

²² Florian Klapproth, 'Waiting as a Temporal Constraint' in *Time: Limits and Constraints*, eds. Jo Alyson Parker, Paul A. Harris, Christian Steineck (Leiden, Boston: Brill, Hotei Publishing, 2010), pp. 179-198, p. 180.

²³ Leonard Lawlor, 'Waiting and Lateness: The Context, Implications, and Basic Argument of Derrida's "Awaiting (at) Arrival" (*S'attendre a l'arivee*) in *Aporias*' in *Research in Phenomenology* 38 (2008), pp. 392-403, p. 399.

attention to the complex nature of female service as is presented in early modern drama, and the ways in which elite female service is defined by a non-linear progression towards an ending which is simultaneously both fixed and uncertain.

I define passive waiting as taking place when an individual patiently and passively accepts the waiting period. This idea of waiting – waiting with patient endurance and accepting what is to come, rather than seeking out a desired future – is central to Christian temporal philosophy. In the early modern period, the anticipation of Christ's Second Coming was frequently evoked to conceptualise how, unable to change their fate, individuals should patiently wait for an uncertain ending. However, as Lewis notes, the true test of Christian faith was 'the subject's ability patiently to persist through trials without any focus on redemption or reward in times to come'.²⁴ This sense of patience as a form of waiting without the promise of a reward, is not, I suggest, actually a form of waiting, in that there is no ending or expectation of something to come, but is rather a form of suffering. Passive waiting – what was expected of elite female servants – is an acceptance of the waiting period with an understanding of the obligation or promise of the reward to come. This is slightly different from the model of good Christian patience, then, as it presents waiting as a kind of investment for a future reward or promise to be fulfilled. Barret notes that, 'A promise relies on the belief that present words can mandate future action; it constructs a reciprocal relationship between present and future as it negotiates the present's ability to control the future, and the future's obligation to take seriously the intentions and commitments of the present'.²⁵ Passive waiting relies on belief – belief that what is promised to come will surely come.

²⁴ Lewis, p. 58.

²⁵ Barret, p. 33.

An obvious example of passive waiting in early modern drama is the character of Patience in *Henry VIII* or *All is True*. In her final scene, Katherine petitions for her women to be rewarded for their loyal and patient service:

My next poor petition
Is, that his noble grace would have some pity
Upon my wretched women, that so long
Have followed both my fortunes faithfully:
Of which there is not one, I dare avow –
And now I should not lie – but will deserve,
For virtue and true beauty of the soul,
For honesty and decent carriage,
A right good husband – let him be a noble –
And sure those men are happy that shall have 'em.
(4.2.138-146)

As Katherine first describes how her women ‘have followed both my fortunes faithfully’ – serving her both as Queen and following her displacement – she draws attention to their patient and passive waiting. This loyalty and obedience, their acceptance of their current state, leads Katherine to request that Patience and her other elite female servants be rewarded with a good marriage. However, given Katherine’s current state, it remains unclear whether her women will be rewarded for their service: this decision rests on Henry’s shoulders. As he has quickly dismissed his loyal and chaste wife, it appears likely that he will not consider Katherine’s dying request. The extent to which her elite female servants will lose out on a fortunate future because of the demise of their mistress is emphasised by the ways in which Katherine petitions and begs Henry to have some sympathy for their daughter and her servants. The promised reward of marriage for passive waiting, for the patient and loyal service they have performed, appears unlikely to be fulfilled upon Katherine’s death. As she exits, Katherine begs Patience: ‘Nay, Patience, / You must not leave me yet [...] When I am dead, good wench, / Let me be used with honour. Strew me over / With maiden flowers’ (4.2.165-169). That Patience is a true and loyal

servant is exemplified in Katherine's request that she stay in her service until she dies, and then provide her with a proper burial. Her trust in her servant highlights the patient endurance and loyal service Patience has performed.

The second mode of waiting we frequently see in early modern drama is active waiting, in which one takes action to shorten the waiting period. Active waiting encompasses the idea that an individual is urgently seeking out their desired future. Prescriptive writers warned against this form of waiting in service. In William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), in his description 'Of the vnlawfull libertie which seruants take to themselues', he cautions against the servants that 'doe purposely mary to free themselues: because our lawes doe free a maide that is married from her seruice to master and mistresse'.²⁶ Through active waiting, servants seek to bring the conclusion to service (i.e., marriage) into the present moment rather than allowing it to remain a future goal outside of their control. This is frequently depicted in early modern drama. Helen, in Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* is an extreme instance of a woman who actively waits in service. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Two, Helen, a waiting gentlewoman, is in love with her mistress's son, Bertram. As Bertram leaves home for a wardship at court, Helen devises a plan to follow him to Paris under the guise of healing the King's fistula. Upon successfully restoring the King's health, she is promised her choice of husband and chooses Bertram. Throughout the play, as a waiting gentlewoman and then as a wife, Helen rejects the idea of passive waiting and instead actively tries to bring her desired future – a fulfilled and consummated marriage to Bertram – into the present moment. In John Webster's *The White Devil* – a play to which I will return in Chapter Three – Zanche, the Black female servant, concocts a plan to rob her mistress of 'coin and jewels' and escape service by eloping with

²⁶ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), qq7v-qq8r.

Mulinassar (the disguised Duke of Florence) (5.3.255).²⁷ Zanche remains in service but actively seeks to hasten its ending. In Chapter Two and then in Chapter Three, I explore how Helen and Zanche actively bargain with men, engaging in modes of exchange, as a way to prematurely leave service.

The third mode of waiting I consider is imposed waiting: waiting which is imposed on an individual by another. When Person A dictates and controls the actions and future of Person B, Person B can either resist or passively accept this imposition. I suggest imposed waiting is a form of delay. Derrida describes this as a transitive form of waiting. He suggests the transitivity of the expecting, ‘the waiting for something that will happen as [...] completely other than oneself’, i.e., the waiting that is imposed on you by another is unstable.²⁸ The enforcer of the waiting can unpredictably place limitations on the other person; the enforcer is then in control, destabilising the movement and progression of the other. If we consider this within the context of early modern service, imposed waiting presents as an extended delay in which either society or the household will not allow a woman to leave service. As I will discuss in my analysis of *Henry VIII* and *A Wife for a Month*, we frequently see imposed waiting – an extended delay – occur with older elite female servants, women who remain in the waiting state for longer than expected. The promise of marriage allows for the conclusion of service, yet if that promise is never fulfilled, then the period of waiting continues. A play which presents this form of imposed waiting on a younger elite female servant is Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. After Bassanio wins Portia’s hand in marriage, Gratiano asks for permission to marry Nerissa, Portia’s waiting gentlewoman: ‘And when your honours mean to solemnize / The bargain of your faith, I

²⁷ John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. Benedict S. Robinson (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2019).

²⁸ Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 66.

do beseech you / Even at that time I may be married too' (3.2.192-4).²⁹ Although Bassanio welcomes their betrothal, Portia does not give Nerissa permission to marry. After Bassanio learns of Antonio's business failings and debt, which he himself is partly to blame, Portia demands:

First go with me to church and call me wife,
And then away to Venice to your friend,
For never shall you lie by Portia's side
With an unquiet soul. You shall have gold
To pay the petty debt twenty times over.
When it is paid, bring your true friend along;
My maid Nerissa and myself meantime
Will live as maids and widows.

(3.2.302-309)

Portia imposes waiting on Nerissa so she will remain in her service for an extended and uncertain period, until the men return. It is through imposed waiting that Portia prevents Nerissa from naturally transitioning out of service.³⁰

The final mode of waiting is a form of deferral: self-imposed waiting. This is the idea that an individual imposes delay on their own situation by deferring an event or action and therefore preventing it from occurring. I suggest that self-imposed waiting is a form of resistance and allows elite female servants to claim agency through the waiting period. Derrida considers this to be a form of reflexivity: 'one simply awaits oneself [...] I await myself, and nothing else'.³¹ In removing that future conclusion – the object or event one is waiting for – freedom and choice can be achieved from within the temporal constrictions of waiting. This is most obvious in Fletcher's *The Pilgrim*, in which the elite female servant, Juletta, manipulates the temporal

²⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, The Third Arden Series, ed. John Drakakis (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2011).

³⁰ Although Nerissa is forced into a state of extended delay, it is by remaining in Portia's female-centred household that both women find the authority to, in turn, impose waiting on their husbands. When disguised as men at the court in Venice, following the proceedings with Shylock and Antonio, both Portia and Nerissa covertly convince their husbands to give them their wedding rings. When the husbands return to Belmont, ringless, their wives swear 'I will ne'er come in your bed / Until I see the ring' (5.1.190-1). Much like the ladies in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Portia and Nerissa impose waiting on their husbands to test their resolve.

³¹ Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 64.

limitations of service (which were structured to suppress female action) throughout the play by self-imposing waiting. In doing so, she acquires authority over her master. Through her various tricks and disguises, she taunts and teases her master for the benefit of her mistress (Alinda, his daughter). When, at the end of the play, he tries to marry her off to any man that will take her, she replies, 'No I beseech you Sir; / My Mistress is my husband, with her I'll dwell still, / And when you play any more pranks you know where to have me' (5.4.119-121).³² By self-imposing waiting and by choosing to remain in her mistress's service, Juletta defers the reward of service (marriage). Juletta's statement queers social and temporal expectations of femininity and futurity. By refusing marriage to a man, she resists a linear future, one which is tied to procreation. In doing so, she threatens the institution of marriage as she refuses to part with her virginity. Theodora A. Jankowaski describes this kind of character as the 'perpetual virgin'.³³ This was not the model of 'the diffident young virgin who was destined to be married and lead a quiet life producing children and ensuring a husband's inheritance'; rather, '[s]he represented everything no respectable or acceptable woman should be. As a perpetual virgin, she was easily viewed as a monster'.³⁴ By resisting marriage, Juletta declines to participate in patriarchal and social institutions of heteronormativity. Much like the ladies of *Love's Labour's Lost*, Juletta's self-imposed waiting challenges heteronormative linear patterns of futurity.

Furthermore, Juletta's statement which constructs Alinda as both 'mistress' and 'husband' disrupts binaries of oppositional difference. It is helpful here to think of Jonathan Gil Harris's concept of 'crumpled time' which describes the 'quilting together [of] old and new, pre- and

³² John Fletcher, *The Pilgrim*, ed. Cyrus Hoy, in *The Dramatic Works in The Beaumont and Fletcher Canon* Vol. VI, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³³ Theodora A. Jankowaski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 4.

³⁴ Jankowaski, p. 4.

post-, past and present’: in essence, the ways in which discrete points of time may be superimposed.³⁵ What Harris is describing is a polychronic form of time, specifically the ways in which moments or objects that are ‘temporally coded distinctions of religion, race, and sexuality’ overlap.³⁶ Juletta’s description superimposes temporally coded distinctions of gender and of service on to Alinda’s identity. Alinda is figured as polychronic as both Juletta’s current mistress and as her future husband. What’s more is that she is imagined as Juletta’s reward for her time spent in service, and as the temporal marker of service’s conclusion. If marriage temporally signified the end of the service period, then by claiming her mistress to be her husband, Juletta constructs both her own and her mistress’s identities to be polychronic and polymorphic.

Through all four modes of waiting, women can acquire the freedom to choose how they will wait. Whether it be passive, active, imposed, or self-imposed, the liminality of waiting allows for an unexpected future to be molded. One final Derridean concept I wish to consider when examining elite female service is *futur and l’avenir*: the predictable and unexpected future.

Derrida describes this juxtaposing concept as such:

The future is that which – tomorrow, later, next century – will be. There’s a future that is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, *l’avenir* (to come), which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival. So if there is a real future beyond the other known future, it’s *l’avenir* in that it’s the coming of the Other when I am completely unable to foresee their arrival.³⁷

Elite female servants served with the understanding that marriage would act as the future reward for service. Prescriptive literature of the period described the “good servant” complex, which

³⁵ Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 170.

³⁶ Harris, p. 170.

³⁷ Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, *Derrida: Screenplay and Essays on the Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 53.

encouraged individuals to perform good service so that when they become a mistress or master, they would be rewarded with good servants of their own. Gouge alludes to this when he tells servants that, in the future, God would reward them for their current service by providing ‘such servants for them, as they were to their masters’.³⁸ This literature anticipates a future shaped by actions that occur in the present moment. However, although marriage presented as the expected reward and future for one’s time in service, as with the Second Coming there was an uncertainty as to when or how that future would unfold. Luka Trebežnik suggests that ‘[t]he promise acts as the privileged modus for the appearance of the future, but not the determinable promise or hope, but the indeterminate one. The future as *l’avenir* is entirely outside of the imaginable horizon, cannot be expected, and must remain unexpected’.³⁹ The future, in this sense, is not absolute.⁴⁰ I propose that the way an elite female servant waits allows for her to take control of and determine her future, either bringing it into the present moment or delaying it entirely. Because the terms of the service contract were not absolute, its future-focused nature and the anticipated promise of marriage complicate the linear progression of service. As early modern drama demonstrates, elite female servants are forced to take matters into their own hands as they either actively seek to bring that future ending into the present moment or actively delay that ending from entering the present moment. It appears then, to answer my earlier question, that waiting is defined by the events that occur while one is waiting, as waiting itself can change or determine that future goal (what one is waiting for). Therefore, if service is defined by the events that occur while one is

³⁸ William Gouge, Tt2v.

³⁹ Luka Trebežnik, ‘Being on the Brink of the Future: Jacques Derrida and Poetics of Waiting’ in *Bogoslovni vestnik/Theological Quarterly* 79 (2019) 2, pp. 347-356, p. 351.

⁴⁰ For a detailed analysis of time as inherently dynamic and unstable, see Jonathan Gil Harris’s *Untimely Matter*. Harris’s analysis of time and *Othello* is particularly helpful in understanding how time can be conceptualised as a ‘shifting’ and dynamic field’ in which the past, present, and future can overlap, ‘suggesting affinity and proximity rather than difference and distance between elements of then and now’. Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), see specifically pp. 4, 24, 169.

waiting, it is through the action of waiting that elite female servants can assert agency to shape their own futures. In the next section, I draw upon these modes of waiting and Derrida's deconstruction of *l'avenir* to consider the ways in which elite female servants wait in *Henry VIII* and *A Wife for a Month* and the effect this has on their future.

Waiting in Service in *Henry VIII*

Henry VIII presents three elite female servants all of whom navigate and interact with complex socially, patriarchally, and temporally imposed boundaries. In this section, I investigate how forms of waiting affect Anne's, the Old Lady's, and Patience's futures, and the consequences one woman's temporal experience may have on another. Although the play has generated rich historical, authorial, and intersectional criticism, few scholars have considered the place of temporality in *Henry VIII*, and none have looked at the ways in which the temporal experience of service affects each woman's narrative.⁴¹ *Henry VIII* offers the scope to investigate the ambiguities of the future-promise of marriage as a reward for service, as well as how various categories of waiting, which are either imposed by others or self-imposed, both enable and prevent women from leaving the liminal period of service.

⁴¹ Gordon McMullan's introduction to his Arden Shakespeare edition (2000) considers the early modern iconography of 'Truth' (portrayed as a young woman trapped in a cave) and 'Time' (an old man who saves her), and how the play dramatises this through Cranmer and the baby Elizabeth. In drawing attention to Henry's lack of temperance, which as McMullan notes in early modern England 'signified both moderation and timeliness, both self-restraint and the ability to capitalize on the moment', McMullan illustrates the intersection between Time, temporality, and temperance within the play (pp. 85-7). More recently, Philip Lorenz has analysed how the play depicts the relationship between dynastic succession and dramatic form, and more broadly, how it understands the treatment of time in the early modern period. Lorenz addresses the critical treatment of the play's time, noting complaints of 'its radical compression of events and its destruction of historical sequence' in order to draw attention to the play's repetitive pattern where characters rise to success, fall 'rapidly into calamity and/or death', and are then immediately replaced by a successor; through this, Lorenz draws attention to Henry's temporal inconstancy and his 'compulsion to repeat' (p. 58, 66). See Philip Lorenz, 'In the Course and Process of Time': Rupture, Reflection and Repetition in *Henry VIII* in *Temporality, Genre, and Experience in the Age of Shakespeare: Forms of Time*, (ed.) Lauren Shohet (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), pp. 57-76.

Act two scene three begins with Anne Boleyn (Queen Katherine’s maid of honour) and the Old Lady in the middle of a conversation.⁴² Although the text does not specify whether the Old Lady is an aged elite female servant or simply an aged courtier, it is notable that her elite social position as a Lady and her age define her character. I will shortly return to this but it is important to recognise that socially, both the Old Lady and Anne would identify as part of the nobility. In this scene, the question of ‘who would be a queen’ arises as the two women discuss the Queen’s dejected state. Anne proclaims, ‘By my troth and maidenhead, / I would not be a queen’: she seemingly denies thinking in a future-focused manner (2.3.23-4). However, the Old Lady acknowledges the pretense of her oath and rebuts her: ‘Beshrew me, I would, / And venture maidenhead for’t; and so would you / For all this spice of your hypocrisy’ (2.3.24-5). Anne evokes the temporal framework of patience to confirm her moral virtue as a chaste maid. Gordon McMullan suggests that in this scene, Anne’s ‘ostensible innocence is put under considerable pressure’.⁴³ However, Anne is notably not passively waiting but rather pretending to do so. She performs passive waiting, presenting the image of the “good” woman who willingly accepts her current state without actively seeking out her desired (a future as the Queen of England). It is this spectacle of passive waiting which the Old Lady scrutinises:

<i>Old Lady</i>	You, that have so fair parts of woman on you, Have, too, a woman’s heart which ever yet Affected eminence, wealth, sovereignty; [...]
<i>Anne</i>	You would not be a queen? No, not for all the riches under heaven. (2.3.27-39)

⁴² Historically, Anne Boleyn was the daughter of an Earl and part of the nobility. She initially served as a maid of honour to the Queen of France, before attending to Queen Katherine in England.

⁴³ McMullan, *Henry VIII*, p. 80.

The Old Lady finds fault in Anne's rejection of what she considers to be an ordinary desire for women: the desire for social mobility. She argues that it is natural for women to want 'eminence, wealth, [and] sovereignty', as this ensures a productive social progression, and therefore she suggests it is hypocritical of Anne to claim that, as a woman, she does not aspire to advance. Kim Noling proposes that 'Shakespeare protects Anne by having her deny all ambition, but he lets the Old Lady challenge Anne's denial as hypocrisy'.⁴⁴ This denial presents as a form of passive waiting which the Old Lady then critiques. The Old Lady's rhetoric is explicitly sexual as she plays with the dual meaning of queen and quean (an early modern word for prostitute) to draw attention to the ways in which social progression occurs. McMullan notes that once again, 'the dividing line between queen and whore is blurred' because the 'techniques required to become the King's wife are much the same as those required to become a prostitute'.⁴⁵ It is the Old Lady's vague distinction between queen and quean, wife and whore, that highlights female routes to advancement. As the play demonstrates, how an elite female servant waits directly shapes her future.

The beginning of this scene, as both Noling and McMullan have acknowledged, distinctly resembles Desdemona and Emilia's discussion of infidelity in *Othello*. Desdemona swears she would never abuse her husband 'for all the world', just as Anne swears she would not be a queen 'for all the world' (4.3.63; 2.3.46).⁴⁶ It is female action which Anne dismisses and which Desdemona scorns, and yet it is female action which the Old Lady and Emilia argue

⁴⁴ Kim Noling, 'Grubbing Up the Stock: Dramatizing Queens in Henry VIII' in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Autumn, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1988), pp. 291-306, p. 299.

⁴⁵ McMullan, *Henry VIII*, p. 293, fnt. 45.

⁴⁶ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, The Arden Third Series, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann, Ayanna Thompson (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2016). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the play will be taken from this edition.

would grant women 'all the world'. Whereas the Old Lady defends female action as a vehicle towards preferment, Emilia advocates for female action as a form of justice. When Emilia states 'though we have some grace, / Yet have we some revenge', she claims that although women may be passive and perhaps merciful, they have the agency to act and retaliate (4.3.91-2). It is therefore the question of morally acceptable female action which comes under scrutiny. Emilia believes female action is acceptable if a wife has been ill-treated: 'Then let them use us well: else let them know, / The ills we do, their ills instruct us so' (4.3.101-2). Both Emilia and the Old Lady suggest that it is through action rather than passive waiting that women can escape their current states and achieve their desired futures.

Desdemona, much like Anne, employs and performs the temporal framework of patience to confirm her moral virtue as a chaste wife. However, it is her previous disobedient action (marrying Othello without her father's permission) which challenges the feminine ideals of the period. From the play's beginning, Desdemona presents as a complex character who is both obedient and disobedient, independent and dependent, active and submissive. Anne, on the other hand, presents herself as purely passive, patient, and innocent, refusing to imagine a future created by female action. Her performance of patience is directly linked to her performance of idealised femininity as she presents herself as both a "good" woman and "good" servant. Although Anne, as I will show, achieves preferment through passive waiting and inaction, Desdemona has clearly already performed what society would consider immoral action (marrying Othello) to achieve her ambitions. I will return to discuss *Othello* in more detail in Chapter Four, but it is important to note that it is Emilia and the Old Lady, the lower status wife and the older courtier, who recognise a reality which necessitates action. It is this reality which

neither Anne nor Desdemona can accept, as women who are socially more elite and who as a result it seems are committed to the performance of patience.

In the Old Lady's response to Anne's repetitive oaths – 'In faith, for little England / You'd venture an emballing. I myself / Would for Caernafonshire, although there longed / No more to th' crown but that' – she foreshadows an imminent future (2.2.46-9).⁴⁷ With the Lord Chamberlain's entrance, just a mere two lines later, comes the news of Anne's social and financial advancement: 'the King's majesty [...] Does purpose honour to you no less flowing / Than Marchioness of Pembroke, to which title / A thousand pound a year annual support' (2.3.60-64). Anne's acceptance of this announcement – 'I do not know / What kind of my obedience I should tender. / More than my all is nothing' – implicitly recognises her sexuality (2.3.65-67). If, in the early modern period, 'nothing' was slang for 'vagina', then Anne's statement acknowledges the importance of her sexuality and procreativity in accepting Henry's offer (being both queen and quean), which she had so fervently rejected moments before in her conversation with the Old Lady.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the Lord Chamberlain's aside that '[b]eauty and honour in [Anne] are so mingled / That they have caught the king: and who knows yet / But from this lady may proceed a gem / To lighten all this isle?' directly hints at Anne's reproductive future (2.3.76-9). Although Anne continues to deny any ambition following the Lord Chamberlain's exit, stating that this advancement 'is strange to me' and that '[i]t faints me/ To think what follows', the Old Lady seems to know exactly what will follow and to whom Anne is now obliged as she ironically states: 'The Marchioness of Pembroke? / A thousand pounds a year, for pure respect? / No other obligation? By my life, / That promises more thousands'

⁴⁷ For scholarship on the Old Lady and the significance of her Welsh identity, see Rory Loughnane, 'I myself would for Caernarfonshire': The Old Lady in *King Henry VIII* in *Celtic Shakespeare: The Bard and the Borderers*, (eds.) Willy Maley and Rory Loughnane (Vermont and Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), pp. 185-202.

⁴⁸ See McMullan, p. 295, ftnt. 65-72.

(2.3.88-104). Upon this preferment, Anne's future becomes entirely predictable as she becomes the vehicle through which Henry can achieve his desired future. In gifting her a social title and yearly salary, Henry advances her social position – an advancement which was generally associated with marriage. His public show of favour promises future rewards for Anne, and it is this unexpected and far off future that he brings into the more immediate moment.

Henry challenges the concept of passive waiting in service by imposing haste on Anne. I suggest that the concept of imposed haste is a temporal constraint enacted by an outside force, in which one person enables another's actions to progress with speed to suit their own urgent needs. The *OED* defines 'haste' as 'quickness without due consideration or reflection', 'eagerness to do something quickly; a pressing need or desire; impatience, urgency'.⁴⁹ Early modern proverbs often frown upon this impatience and urgency, suggesting that actions done in haste will soon be regretted: 'haste maketh waste', 'acts done in haste, by leasure are repenteth', and those 'who do wed and marry in haste have enough afterward [to repent]'.⁵⁰ Henry imposes haste on Anne, quickly advancing her through the period of service to satisfy his own immediate desires. The play itself further emphasises Henry's haste by squeezing the action into a few hours. Henry interrupts Anne's timely and passive progression through service and adolescence as he first offers her preferment, and then rushes her into a marriage and pregnancy to fulfill his own obsessive desire for a son. Their relationship becomes entirely future-focused as the responsibility for the King's succession is placed solely on Anne.

⁴⁹ 'haste, v. 1a', *OED Online*, Oxford English Dictionary < www.oed.com/view/Entry/84479> [Accessed 10.03.2023].

⁵⁰ 'haste, n. P2a' *OED Online*, Oxford English Dictionary < www.oed.com/view/Entry/84478> [Accessed 10.03.2023].

Unlike Anne, who is gifted preferment and who we witness evolve through social and biological life cycles – she transforms from maid of honour to queen, and from maid to wife to mother – throughout the course of the play, the Old Lady remains in a state of extended delay.

Upon the Lord Chamberlain's immediate exit, she exclaims:

I have been begging sixteen years in court –
Am yet a courtier beggarly, nor could
Come pat betwixt too early and too late
For any suit of pounds – and you (O, fate!),
A very fresh fish here – fie, fie, fie upon
This compelled fortune! – have your mouth filled up
Before you open it.

(2.3.82-88)

The Old Lady expresses frustration towards her own social and economic state. As I discussed in the Introduction, if a woman never marries and remains delayed in perpetual service, her social life cycle remains in a state of stagnation. Although it is unclear whether the Old Lady is an elite female servant to Anne or a courtier to the Queen, she is nevertheless temporally constrained.

The Old Lady describes how she is caught in a state of extended delay, unable to escape begging at court and unable to get the timing right with her request for money: this delay halts her from progressing linearly through court life. The Old Lady draws attention to the temporal inconsistencies of age and service as her older, poorer and delayed state contrasts with the youth, riches, and haste that Anne experiences. McMullan notes that the image of Anne as a 'fresh fish' presents her as 'a fish who has been waiting no time at all to be hooked'.⁵¹ The Old Lady on the other hand, has been fishing for a fortune at court for sixteen years and has not been able to make a catch. Critics have associated the Old Lady with the *Celestina* figure, one who is both 'indispensable and destructive', who 'helps to facilitate the action; yet her mode of expression

⁵¹ McMullan, p. 296, ftnt. 87-8.

bids fair to dissolve any notion of stable values in a way that can issue only in chaos'.⁵² Nicholas G. Round argues that the Old Lady's actions bare a resemblance to Rojas's *Celestina* in that she is 'the deceptive acquiescence in ethical commonplace; the strong incitement to a sexual liaison that will bring worldly advancement with it; the role of a messenger who shamelessly manipulates the content of her message'.⁵³ Although the Old Lady employs a sexual rhetoric and later acts as a messenger to the King to achieve economic mobility, I suggest her actions more accurately resemble the older servant stuck in a state of extended delay, a stock figure who appears in early modern drama, yet one who has not received due critical attention. Much like Cassandra in *A Wife for a Month* or the older waiting gentlewoman, Abigail, in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* (1613-6), it is the stagnation of the Old Lady's social and economic state which entices and enables her to take action, rather than her bawdy disposition.⁵⁴

As we witness Anne progress through youth and service into marriage and pregnancy, the Old Lady's stagnation becomes all the more obvious. We see her failure to socially and economically advance play out in her final scene. In act five scene one, unwilling to wait for a formal invitation to enter into the King's presence, the Old Lady bursts in to relay the news of Elizabeth's birth. She plays the messenger and accepts the task with the explicit expectation of a substantial reward for her service. However, her attempts are thwarted when Henry interrupts her, asking, 'Is the Queen delivered' and then immediately demands, 'Say 'Ay, and of a boy'' (5.1.162-3). The Old Lady obeys as she replies, 'Ay, ay, my liege, / And of a lovely boy', but then corrects herself when she informs him, 'The God of heaven / Both now and ever bless her:

⁵² Nicholas G. Round, 'Rojas' Old Bawd and Shakespeare's Old Lady: *Celestina* and the Anglican Reformation' in *Celestinesca*, Vol. 21, No. 1/2 (1997), pp. 93-109, p. 98, 102.

⁵³ Round, p. 102.

⁵⁴ When servant characters who experience social delay take action, this action sometimes results in their demise. If the play is a comedy, they are made fun of (like Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*), and if it is a tragedy or tragicomedy, like *A Wife for a Month*, these characters are often removed from service or disposed of.

'tis a girl / Promises boys hereafter' (5.1.163-6). The Old Lady is forced to confront the present moment of Henry's succession crisis and attempts to secure his uncertain future. She ironically promises Henry a future on Anne's behalf, a future he has been hoping for – which an audience of 1613 knew would not be fulfilled – and then immediately removes that future from him. Barret observes that 'a promise relies on the belief that present words can mandate future action'.⁵⁵ The promise is built on the predictability and obligation of future actions, yet it is explicit that neither the Old Lady nor Anne can fulfill such a future.

Because Anne has not supplied Henry with a son, the Old Lady is rewarded the equivalent sum 'an ordinary groom' would receive.⁵⁶ She is shocked to be paid only 'an hundred marks', and impatiently exclaims, 'By this light, I'll ha' more. / An ordinary groom is for such payment' (5.1.171-2). It is the expectation of a future reward which motivates the Old Lady's actions and service, yet it is her impatient persistence to alter her current state which delays her from achieving any fortune. The more she tries to alter her current circumstances, the less likely she is to succeed. Unlike Anne, the Old Lady is unable to manage waiting, both as a form of service and as a temporal action, and it is this failure that prolongs her current state. Because she does not receive her expected reward, she remains stagnated in her delayed state.

As Anne actively denies being future-focused and passively (and performatively) accepts her waiting period, her future becomes the present moment of the play. In contrast, the Old Lady welcomes and openly seeks out a future of advancement, and yet it is through this activity that she in fact hinders her own progression and remains in a state of delay. Patience, as I have suggested, embodies passive waiting. In *Henry VIII* the temporality of women's mobility and

⁵⁵ Barrett, p. 33.

⁵⁶ See McMullan, p. 402, ftnt. 172.

their unknown futures are connected: as one passively waits or experiences imposed haste, this causes another woman to face delay. The Old Lady's temporal experience is impacted by Anne's as she biologically and socially evolves through life cycle stages (from pregnant wife to mother). However, because Anne does not produce a son and male heir to the throne, the Old Lady cannot socially and economically progress. Similarly, it is because of Anne's progression that Patience's future is effectively delayed, as her mistress is supplanted. Furthermore, it is Anne's actions (marrying Henry) that cause Katherine's demise. Anne, in many ways, disrupts the notion of the idealised passively waiting elite female servant: she is expected to wait on her mistress with the promise of her own husband, and is instead given her mistress's husband (although the play presents all the action as due to Henry's initiative). As Henry's intemperance upends household order, the play brings into focus Anne's vulnerability as a maid of honour and the fragility of her own temporal progression – one which readers and audiences would know ended prematurely. *Henry VIII* engages with the identity of the elite female servant as it is defined by the temporal concept of waiting, and the play explores the ways in which waiting (or the performance of waiting) can be both empowering and disempowering for these women. By drawing connections amongst the elite female servants by way of the temporal concept of waiting, we can see how Anne benefits from waiting and how her progression through service and into marriage works to delay Patience, the Old Lady, and Katherine. Equally, the play demonstrates how taking action, as the Old Lady does, can inhibit future actions and natural social progressions from occurring, leaving her trapped in a liminal and disempowered state. As I will show in the next section, how and when it is justifiable for a woman to take action determines her success or failure.

Henry VIII presents a sometimes messy but extreme depiction of elite female servants navigating temporal experiences. Early modern drama portrays elite female servants at distinct

stages throughout their time in service, yet we rarely ever witness a conclusion; marriage proposals often occur on stage, but marriages do not. Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* is unique in that we witness Anne Boleyn's progress through social and biological life cycles: first in elite service, then as she marries, and finally as she procreates. Although elite female service had its expected natural progression, it was affected by both the ways in which women waited, and how delay or haste could be imposed on the women. The play highlights how the linear progression of service towards marriage can be delayed by forms of waiting, yet as we see, it is through waiting, both as a form of service and as a temporal action, that these women passively or actively seek out a future which is neither predictable nor fully unexpected.

Temporal Constraints and Female Action in *A Wife for a Month*

In Fletcher's solo piece, *A Wife for a Month*, he revives an earlier narrative, this time giving the elite female servants a voice with which to speak out against socially and patriarchally imposed limitations. Although *A Wife for a Month* has not received the critical attention of *Henry VIII*, I suggest that it too addresses the ambiguities of the service and marriage contract and, in a way, looks back to Shakespeare's and Fletcher's earlier work.⁵⁷ The plot of *A Wife for a Month* is centered on King Frederick placing temporal limitations on Evanthe, a maid of honour, for refusing his advances because she is in love with Valerio, the King's companion. The King, jealous and upset, forces the two to marry the following day under the condition that within a

⁵⁷ There is little criticism on *A Wife for a Month*. Gordon McMullan surveys this play alongside Fletcher's later work to draw attention to 'what can by now be recognized as a Fletcherian norm': a corrupt court, a lustful monarch, and a political situation in which women must confront the 'absolute tendencies of the monarch' and acknowledge 'parliamentary procedure as the arbitrator of moral power'. See Gordon McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amhurst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 174-175. The two published articles which analyse *A Wife for a Month* primarily focus on Fletcher's use of revisionary brackets. For more on this, see Robert Kean Turner, 'Revisions and Repetition-Brackets in Fletcher's "A Wife for a Month"' in *Studies in Bibliography*, 1983, Vol. 36 (1983), pp. 178-190; Meg Powers Livingston, 'Repetition Brackets: Plus or Minus? A Reinterpretation of the Evidence in *The Woman's Prize* and *A Wife for a Month*' in *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, September 2008, Vol. 102, No. 3, pp. 315-339.

month's time, Valerio will die, and if Evanthe cannot immediately find another husband who will succumb to the same temporal arrangement, then she will die as well. Although Evanthe patiently accepts this future, the King, Valerio, and her ageing waiting gentlewomen, Cassandra, all impose temporal restraints on her, preventing her from passively waiting. I suggest all four modes of waiting which I have defined in this chapter are present in the play: Evanthe evokes self-imposed waiting to protect her chastity against Frederick who is trying to impose haste, both Evanthe and Valerio perform passive waiting and accept death as a form of resistance against the King, Valerio imposes waiting on Evanthe on the night of their wedding, and Cassandra takes action against her mistress and actively waits in order to evade perpetual service and a state of extended delay. These examples highlight how characters navigate imposed temporal limitations to achieve their own desires. Drawing on the theoretical concepts of waiting and the future that I have presented in this chapter, I consider how *A Wife for a Month*, like *Henry VIII*, lends itself to explore how waiting is figured as a temporal constraint of service and how it also works as a form of female retaliation.

From the play's outset, Frederick places Evanthe in a predicament: he knows she loyally serves the Queen but nevertheless desires her and will stop at nothing to have his way with her. When Evanthe enters, having been sent for and, as it unfolds, pandered out by her brother (Sorano), she is instantly aware of 'the business' that she must now navigate (1.1.70). Sorano has encouraged Frederick to seize the moment and pursue his sister, wooing her with '[l]arge golden promises, and sweet language' (1.1.40). As Frederick attempts to flirt with her, 'Gentle Evanthe –', she immediately interrupts him, deflecting his advances by reminding him of his wife: 'The gracious Queen Sir / Is well and merry [...] And I think she waites you in the Garden' (1.1.75-7). Evanthe evokes the image of his patient and loyal wife in an attempt to terminate his advances.

However, when Frederick reveals the true nature of his ambitions, ‘I love thee to enjoy thee’, she is forced to confront his intemperance (1.1.95). She first addresses his haste – ‘Hold, hold Sir, ye are too fleet’ – and his impatience – ‘Good your Grace, be patient’ – highlighting his inability to control his desires (1.1.96-7, 103). Just as Henry in *Henry VIII* struggles with temperance, which McMullan suggests in early modern England ‘signified both moderation and timeliness, both self-restraint and the ability to capitalize on the moment’, Frederick, too, lacks temporal consciousness and control.⁵⁸ As Frederick attempts to seize the moment, his rash actions draw attention to his inability to control time. Intemperance, as Lewis notes, is a ‘lack of restraint and excess in action’ and is ‘frequently employed as an image of sexual subversion in early modern drama, for both men and women’.⁵⁹ By risking not only his marriage but also the stability of the nation to fulfil his own sexual urges, Frederick shows an inability to plan for the future and a disregard for consequences. His intemperate actions, a result of his own impatience, are purely focused on bringing the future into the present moment.

To mitigate Frederick’s temporal dysfunction and to protect her own future, Evanthe self-imposes waiting. In denying Frederick his immediate desires, she delays him through her refusal to act. This can be read as an act of patient endurance. Lewis explains that ‘patient endurance is [...] a kind of denial of action’.⁶⁰ As Evanthe challenges Frederick to the impossible, ‘get Wantonness confirmed / By Parliament an Act of Honesty, / And so received by all, I’ll harken to ye’, she rejects against his imposed haste (1.1.120-122). Evanthe’s performance of waiting allows her to claim resistance through refusal, combining both passivity and activity

⁵⁸ McMullan, *Henry VIII*, p. 85.

⁵⁹ Lewis, p. 81.

⁶⁰ Lewis, p. 51.

to challenge Frederick's attempt at imposed haste.⁶¹ Denying action is a way of delaying action. As the scene progresses, Evanthe evokes the future to resist Frederick's advances. When he claims that he will divorce the Queen to marry her, Evanthe first critiques his reasoning – 'Divorce ye from a woman of her beauty, / Of her integrity, her piety? [...] Her chaste and virtuous love, are these fit causes?' – to then scrutinise what such a future would hold for them: 'What will you do to me, when I have cloyd ye?' (1.1.137-141). Evanthe draws on reason and judgement to scorn his disregard for the future. When Frederick claims he will 'make [her] kindred mighty', Evanthe responds:

'Tis like enough you may clap honour on them,
 But how 'twill sit, and how men will adore it,
 Is still the question. Ile tell you what they'll say Sir,
 What the report will be, and 'twill be true too
 [...]
These are the issues of her impudence.
 I'll tell your Grace, so dear I hold the Queen
 [...]
 I would first take to me, for my Lust, a Moor
 [...]

Than be your Queen.
 (1.1.150-164)

By challenging his impulses, Evanthe seeks to cement her own future and identity. She knows that if the King divorces the Queen to marry her, she will be tainted by scandal; not only will her future children be debased, but her existing bloodline will be ennobled and face the political repercussions of her sexual actions. As Evanthe's scorn continues, she employs discourses of blackness to highlight the transgressive nature of Frederick's business. By insinuating that she would rather give up her virginity to 'a Moor' than be disloyal to the Queen by giving up her virginity to Frederick, Evanthe evokes discourses of blackness to mark his actions as immoral.⁶²

⁶¹ For further scholarship on women and patient endurance, see Chapter One in Lewis's *Time and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage*.

⁶² See Chapter Three for further analysis on discourses of blackness and the term 'Moor'.

Unlike Anne in *Henry VIII*, Evanthe remains loyal to her mistress. Evanthe exhibits qualities of idealised femininity as performs the role of the good and loyal servant and that of the patient and passive woman, to position herself as morally superior to Frederick. However, in this scene, Evanthe must seize the moment to secure her future, one in which she will be married to Valerio and not ‘high Whore to eternity’ (1.1.168).

In the early modern period, the monarch was imagined as God on earth, and it was God who promised endings; therefore, the divinely ordained King had the authority to define endings for his subjects, and in the case of *Henry VIII* and *A Wife for a Month*, it is the King who could define the ending of service (marriage) for Anne and Evanthe. Lewis notes that it was thought God would dictate the appropriate time for action to occur: ‘the good Christian is empowered to act in the right moment, but that right moment and right action is determined and directed by God’.⁶³ However, as Lewis also suggests, ‘the impossibility of reaching a conclusive “meaning” or ending is also the defining temporal position of an early modern Christian society anticipating the perpetually deferred Day of Judgement’.⁶⁴ Christian temporality promotes passive and patient waiting for an unfixd future or ending - an acceptance of what is to come (*l’avenir*) - as opposed to seizing the moment and capitalising on time. Lewis observes that contemporary religious discourses encouraged ‘a constant fluctuation between the drive to act and the need to delay action’.⁶⁵ Whereas this idea of the ‘ultimate goal’ (or in a Christian context, Christ’s Second Coming) was perpetually deferred, the plot of *A Wife for a Month* is predicated on Frederick acting as God to determine and dictate Evanthe and Valerio’s ending.⁶⁶ And yet, the play

⁶³ Lewis, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Lewis, p. 10.

⁶⁵ Lewis, p. 10.

⁶⁶ See ‘The Early Modern Temporal Consciousness’ in Lewis’s introduction for further explanation of the perpetual deferral of the day of judgement (pp.10-23).

critiques the idea that the king is representative of God on earth as it makes clear that this King is subjected to sexual and temporal desires. Frederick is flawed, and very much human, as he takes action to achieve his own ending.

Because Evanthe so freely rejects Frederick's advances, he and Sorano conclude that she must have another lover. They search her private cabinet and discover Valerio's love letter, in which he swears that *'to be your own but one poor Month, I'd give / My youth, my fortune, and then leave to live'* (1.2.91-2). Frederick confronts the lovers, and in a jealous rage, turns Valerio's metaphorical promise into a literal contract:

<i>Frederick</i>	But one month to enjoy her as your wife, Though at the expiring of that time you die for't.
<i>Valerio</i>	I could wish many, many ages Sir, To grow as old as time in her embraces, If heaven would grant it, and you smile upon it; But if my choice were two hours, and then perish, I would not pull back my heart.
<i>Frederick</i>	You have your wish, Tomorrow I will see you nobly married, Your month take out in all content and pleasure; The first day of the following month you die for't [...] Now mark your sentence, mark it scornful Lady, If when Valerio's dead, within twelve hours, For that's your latest time, you find not out Another husband on the same condition To marry you again, you die your self too.
<i>Evanthe</i>	Now you are merciful, I thank your grace. (1.2.189-205)

Frederick is tormented by the conflicting temporalities of his own impatient action and Evanthe's self-imposed waiting. As he determines Valerio and Evanthe's death sentences, he not only seeks to control his inferiors, but also seeks to control time. The temporal contract Frederick imposes on Valerio and Evanthe authorises him to dictate their futures and their endings: in essence, to play God. However, unlike God, who does not promise or confirm a contractual end date,

Frederick's autocratic decree assigns the couple a specific, fixed deadline. By imposing haste on the lovers, Frederick turns their unexpected future (*l'avenir*) into a fixed and certain ending (*future*).

However, it is Evanthe and Valerio's patient acceptance of this temporal contract through which they discover resistance against Frederick's imposed haste. Following their death sentence, Valerio freely welcomes the imposed temporal conditions, finding joy in time's limitations:

I have done my Journey here, my day is out,
All that the World has else is foolery,
Labour, and loss of time; what should I live for?
Think but Man's Life a Month, and we are happy.
I would not have my Joys grow old for any thing;
A Paradise, as thou art, my Evanthe,
Is only made to wonder at a little
Enough for human Eyes, and then to wander from.
(1.2.219-226)

Valerio performs an active hopefulness as he waits for death. Rather than challenging Frederick, he accepts the possibility of life ending and agrees to find 'paradise' within the waiting period. His ending, like humankind's 'ending' (the Second Coming), is decided for him, and Valerio embraces it as good Christians should. Unable to change his fate, Valerio discovers how, through passive and patient waiting, he can resist Frederick's plan.

Yet, Valerio appears more open to this acceptance than Evanthe. She is not as willing to accept Valerio's immediate death and her potential end. As she confides her worries in her mistress, the Queen 'arms her' with advice:

Make him know his cruelty
Begins with him first, he must suffer for it,
And that thy Sentence is so welcome to thee,
And to thy noble Lord, you long to meet it.
Stamp such a deep impression of thy Beauty

Into his Soul, and of thy Worthiness,
That when Valerio and Evanthe sleep
In one rich Earth, hung round about with Blessings,
He may run mad, and curse his act.

(2.2.35-43)

The Queen urges Evanthe to welcome death and parade this acceptance in front of the King as a form of defiance. Rather than trying to change the future, the Queen encourages Evanthe to perform passive waiting. This inaction – Evanthe’s resolution not to challenge Frederick’s autocratic rule – is, in itself, an action. The Queen depicts resistance against the King as a performance of patience and an acceptance of his imposed future. The Queen herself evokes passive waiting as she waits for her husband to pause his pursuit of her servant. Again, we see how women’s temporal experiences are connected through service. As Evanthe rejects the King’s proposal, she ensures that the Queen’s expected future, a future in which she will remain married to her husband, is prolonged. Evanthe’s actions are a service to the Queen and prevent her mistress’s future from ending in divorce and ruin. Evanthe and Valerio become a metaphor for Christian suffering. Because Evanthe and Valerio can predict their future and actively and patiently accept the waiting period between life and death, they discover the unexpected potential for resistance and joy within waiting.

Yet, as the play continues, the couple are once again delayed by Sorano and Frederick. Moments before Valerio enters Evanthe’s chamber to consummate the marriage, Sorano informs him that if he touches ‘Evanthe’s body / Beyond a kiss, though thou art married to her [...] That minute she shall die’ (3.2.60-63). Upon challenging this condition, Valerio is told that if he confides this to anyone, he too will die. This amendment works to delay Evanthe from becoming a wife, with the hope that she will despise Valerio and finally yield to the King’s desires. When the couple are left alone, Valerio evades Evanthe’s advances, imposing delay on her. He first

feigns sickness, claiming ‘I am not well my love’ (3.3.159). As she flirts with him, enticing him into bed, he then questions her virtue – ‘Art thou so cunning?’ – to which she takes the defensive role – ‘I speak not by experience, pray ye mistake not’ (3.3.161-3). The tension in this scene oscillates between Valerio evading Evanthe, her luring him in, him succumbing to her but then suddenly distancing himself. Evanthe justifies her actions and sexual readiness with reason and time:

But if we love not one another really,
And put our bodies and our minds together
[...]
Our love will prove but a blinde superstition:
This is no school to argue in my Lord,
Nor have we time to talk away allow’d us
(3.3.176-181)

She argues that consummating the marriage is a natural and legal act: without taking action, they are not ‘really’ married.⁶⁷ As I will explore in Chapter Two’s analysis of *All’s Well That Ends Well*, when women like Evanthe or Helen, are left in the liminal state between servant and wife, it is required that they take action in order to shape their future.

Rather than engaging in sexual activity, Valerio defers once again, this time by lingering on the moral philosophy of love:

Let’s sit together thus, and as we sit
Feed on the sweets of one another’s souls.
The happiness of love is Contemplation,
The blessedness of Love is pure Affection,
Where no allay of actual dull Desires,
Of Pleasure that partakes with Wantonness,
Of human Fire that burns out as it kindles,
And leaves the Body but a poor Repentance,
Can ever mix; let’s fix on that, Evanthe

⁶⁷ The consummation of marriage made it legally indissoluble. For more on the legality of marriage in *All’s Well*, see Margaret Loftus Ranald, ‘The Betrothals of “All’s Well That Ends Well”’ in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1963), pp. 179-192.

That's Everlasting, the other Casual.
(3.3.193-202)

Valerio pontificates that without action, love embraces its purest and eternal form, and with action comes love's diminishment. Petrarchan frameworks of desire are being played out in Valerio's speech as he claims that not acting on love, not having what he so desires, is an everlasting love. Valerio concludes with the claim that engaging in pleasure removes pleasure – '[love is] the rarest pleasure [...] [but] once enjoy'd grows stale' (3.3.206-8). This statement is again an attempt at delay. By deferring action, Valerio seeks to curb Evanthe's advances and philosophically justify his own inaction. Evanthe, confused, interprets his inaction as a rejection: "[I] am not worth your noble fellowship [...] you would not else / Thus cunningly seek to betray a Maid [...] Farewell my lord' (3.3.213-218).

Valerio, torn between his love for Evanthe and Frederick's threat, entices her to stay; however, he claims impotence as his only defence against inaction: 'I am no Man [...] No man for women's pleasure, no woman's man' (3.3.231-2). Valerio's excuse is an extreme form of inaction and extended delay in itself. In early modern England, male impotency was socially problematic. As Jennifer Evans explains, '[t]he household was a central feature of early modern society and a site where manhood was both contested and achieved [...] Without children, men could not prove their virility, could be considered lacking as heads of household, and could be excluded from achieving patriarchal manhood'.⁶⁸ Impotency was a social and temporal disruption: it not only prevented a wife from bearing children but also halted the progression of the bloodline. Valerio's excuse fractures Evanthe's natural progression towards her future. By refusing to act and by imposing inaction on Evanthe, Valerio delegitimises their union. Unlike

⁶⁸ Jennifer Evans, 'They are called Imperfect men': Male Infertility and Sexual Health in Early Modern England' in *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2014), pp. 311-332, p. 331.

the ladies in *Love's Labour's Lost* who defer marriage for the set period of a year, Valerio's claim to impotence indefinitely delays the consummation of their marriage. Whereas the ladies' deferral grants them some independence and time to decide their futures without haste, Valerio's hasty inaction prevents their immediate deaths but leaves their futures uncertain. As a result of this, Evanthe is obstructed from progressing both socially and biologically and is forced into a state of extended delay. Unable to consummate their marriage, she becomes trapped in the interval between maid and wife.

As Valerio's inaction delays their consummation, Evanthe is left to confront her moral and temporal dilemma: she can either remain loyal to her seemingly impotent husband and passively wait for their ensuing deaths, or she can take action and yield to the King's advances to save their lives. In a Christian sense, she must decide whether to seize the moment and take action to determine her own future or patiently wait for an unknown future and ending. Much like Helen in Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, who takes action against Bertram's inaction (his refusal to consummate their marriage) – a play which I will return to in the next chapter – Valerio's inaction causes Evanthe to act. Unsure of what to do, she confides in her waiting gentlewoman, Cassandra. Again, much like the scene between Anne and the Old Lady in *Henry VIII*, and between Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello*, the question of when it is morally acceptable to take female action arises. Like Emilia and the Old Lady, Cassandra suggests that is through action, specifically undertaking sexual action with Frederick, that Evanthe can escape her current state of delay and achieve her desired future. However, in this scene, we see Fletcher parody these early plays, turning the question from 'who would not be a queen?' into 'who would not be a whore?':

Evanthe

You think it fit then, mortified Cassandra,
That I should be a Whore?

Cassandra

Why a Whore, Madam?

If every Woman that upon necessity
Did a good turn, for there's the main point, mark it
Were term'd a Whore, who would be honest, Madam?
(4.3.1-5)

Cassandra offers a compelling argument for female action. She suggests that if Evanthe were to engage in sexual activity with the King, she would not be a whore but rather a woman that is acting out of necessity. Playing on the dual meaning of a 'good turn' as both a sexual act and as a good deed, she proceeds to suggest that honour can be found in sexual activity. She articulates the issue at hand: 'Your Lord's life, and your own, are now in hazard, / Two precious lives may be redeemed with nothing; / Little or nothing' (4.3.6-8). Punning on the early modern word 'nothing' – slang for female genitalia – Cassandra indicates that Evanthe and Valerio may be saved by Evanthe engaging in sexual activity with Frederick. Just as in *Othello*, when Desdemona asks if Emilia would be unfaithful to her husband to gain 'all the world', and Emilia retorts with '[t]he world's a huge thing: it is a great price / For a small vice', Cassandra suggests that the act of engaging in adultery with the King is priceless compared to the value of their lives (*Othello*, 4.3.67-69). Like the Old Lady who suggests that it is natural for women to desire and seek out advancement, Cassandra suggests that it is natural for women to engage in activity for moral goodness. Rather than passively and patiently waiting for their deaths, Cassandra urges Evanthe to take action and seize this opportunity.

Cassandra's encouragement, however, is not selfless; by convincing Evanthe to sleep with Frederick, Cassandra will progress out of her current state. In the previous scene, Frederick promises to marry Cassandra off to a knight, granting her social preferment and a designated conclusion to her service experience, if she can convince her mistress to sleep with him:

Frederick

I'll look thee out a Knight shall make thee a Lady too,

A lusty Knight, and one that shall be ruled by thee,
And add to these, I'll make 'em good, no mincing,
Nor ducking out of nicety, good Lady,
But do it home, we'll all be friends too, tell her,
And such a joy –

Cassandra

That's it that stirs me up, Sir,
I would not for the world attempt her Chastity,
But that they may live lovingly hereafter.
[...]

A little evil
May be suffered for a general good, Sir.
(4.2.29-39)

Cassandra is given an ultimatum: she must either remain loyal to her mistress and passively wait for her determined service ending or take action at the King's behest as a means to escape perpetual service. Having not yet married and having aged out of her procreative years, Cassandra represents the older elite female servant who is confined in a state of extended delay. Again, we see how women's temporal experiences are connected through service: if Evanthe does not take action, Cassandra's future remains at a distance; if Cassandra takes action, Evanthe's future with Valerio will potentially be altered. Frederick promises Cassandra marriage, the typical reward for elite female service. His promise – that she will marry a Knight and socially advance to acquire the title of 'Lady' – would, at first glance, place Cassandra in a heteronormative relationship, one which presents her with a linear progression out of service and upwards into society. And yet, as Frederick's proposal offers Cassandra a position of power over her potential husband, thus destabilising normative gendered and social dynamics of power within her future relationship. In the early modern period, male authority and power were not only tied to ideologies of manhood, but also to ideologies of order in which, as head of the household, husbands ruled over their wives. Frederick's proposal would reverse these social norms. He does not offer a typical heteronormative relationship but rather one which disrupts temporal, social, and gendered hierarchies of order. Frederick woos Cassandra to act on his

behalf with the promise of authority and advancement, knowing full well his proposal has the potential to transform her from an elite female servant disempowered by delay into a wife who governs her own household.

The expected linear social progression from servant to wife and the expected linear biological progression from menstruating maid to pregnant wife did not occur when a woman grew old in service and surpassed her procreative years. Because older female bodies were infertile (post-menopause), they were perceived to be unsuitable and undesirable. Although Frederick offers Cassandra a ‘lusty Knight’, he knows full well her age prevents her from procreating. The frequent ridiculing of older female bodies in early modern literature and culture categorises these women as disruptive bodies because they did not conform to an expected social and biological progression.⁶⁹ Even as Frederick encourages Cassandra to do his bidding, he comments on her age and body: ‘Come hither Time [...] Her breath stinks like a Fox, her teeth are contagious / These old women are all Elder-pipes’ (4.2.1, 17-18). Sarah Toulalan suggests, ‘[a]geing was understood to cause deterioration of the sexual and reproductive parts of the body so that the old were thought to be both infertile and physically unfit for sexual activity’.⁷⁰ Earlier in the play, Frederick silences Cassandra, recalling her age and sexuality: ‘Peace, good antiquity, [...] There’s no such cure for the she-falling-sickness, / As the powder of a dried bawds skin, be silent’ (1.2.165–69). Mario DiGangi’s study of bawds in early modern drama observes that it is at moments when the aged female body is ‘portrayed as grotesquely dried up and worn out’ that they signify ‘the loathsomeness of sexual commerce and the betrayal of the ideal of female

⁶⁹ See Sarah Toulalan, ‘“Elderly years cause a Total dispaire of Conception’: Old Age, Sex and Infertility in Early Modern England’ in *Social History of Medicine* Vol. 29, No. 2 (2016), pp. 333-359, p. 333.

⁷⁰ Toulalan, p. 334.

chastity'.⁷¹ In early modern drama, older elite female servants are often portrayed as bawdy, sexually obsessed women, with the power to infect or corrupt young virgins. DiGangi suggests that '[i]n the drama, the old bawd's agency in bringing innocent women to spiritual and physical ruin sometimes elicits fulminations against her rotten and decrepit body'.⁷² I suggest their hypersexual and bawdy depiction speaks to a broader correlation between age and waiting in service. Because these women remain in a state of extended delay, unable to escape the service life cycle without marrying, they are enticed to (more often than not) immorally pursue a way out of service.

Rather than remaining in perpetual service, it is through active waiting that Cassandra navigates the temporal limitations of service and age. Lewis notes that '[w]ithin a patriarchal and teleologically ordered society, the temporality of patient endurance, as both a strategy for coping with perpetual suffering and a form of delayed gratification, is used to promote a particular kind of passive femininity'.⁷³ However, Cassandra's method for 'coping with perpetual suffering and a form of delayed gratification' is to take action. Encouraging her mistress to act is an action in itself, one which will she hopes secures her conclusion to service. Throughout this scene, Cassandra must convince Evanthe, who is uncertain about her own decision to remain true to Valerio, to take action and sleep with Frederick. As Evanthe dismisses Cassandra's initial advice that she may redeem her own life and Valerio's 'with nothing, / Little or nothing; say an hours or days sport', calling her waiting gentlewoman 'a learned Bawd', Cassandra evokes her age to endorse her knowledge: 'You that are young and fair scorne us old creatures, / But you must

⁷¹ Mario DiGangi, *Sexual Types: Embodiment, Agency, and Dramatic Character from Shirley to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 161. DiGangi is one of the few scholars to write about Cassandra; however, he only briefly analyses her in his study of bawds in early modern drama. The ways in which her service position influences her actions has not been critically recognized.

⁷² DiGangi, p. 161.

⁷³ Lewis, p. 63.

know my years ere you be wise Lady, / And my experiences too; say the King loved ye? / Say it were nothing else?’ (4.3. 7-8, 16-21). Although it is Cassandra’s overly familiar knowledge of female sexuality which provokes Evanthe to call her a bawd, Cassandra justifies this knowledge as old age wisdom. In early modern England, older women were either scorned or ridiculed as dangerous, cunning, and witch-like figures, or, as Laura Gowing notes, ‘in roles of caretaking, supervising, and nursing the community’s bodies’.⁷⁴ Cassandra’s elite status as a gentlewoman is undermined by her old age and illicit sexual knowledge; although she may be of a lower social status than her mistress and exhibit a greater sexual awareness, this does not mean that we should read her as a lower ranking servant.

As I have suggested, the women’s conversation, in many ways, resembles that between Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello* and between Anne and the Old Lady in *Henry VIII*: however, in these earlier plays, both Desdemona and Anne remain resolute in their decisions not to take action. Evanthe, on the other hand, is wavering in her resolve. She first asks her waiting gentlewoman, ‘canst thou tell me, / Though he be a King, whether he be sound or no? / I would not give up my youth to infection’, and then questions, ‘But when I have lyen with him, what am I then, Gentlewoman?’ (4.3.28-30, 36). Evanthe probes the very nature of how action can shape her identity and her future. Cassandra’s response is, in many ways, problematic. I include it in full below, for she offers what could, initially, be a feminist reading of women’s action and sexuality; however, there is a shift which moves us toward a critique of women who perform purity and passive waiting, suggesting that they too take part in and enjoy the violent, sexual action they are subjected to:

What are you? Why the same as you are now, a Woman,
A virtuous woman, and a noble woman,

⁷⁴ Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 76.

Touching at what is noble, you become so.
 Had *Lucrece* e'ere been thought of, but for *Tarquin*?
 She was before a simple unknown woman,
 When she was ravisht, she was a reverant Saint;
 And do you think she yielded not a little?
 And had a kind of will to have been re-ravisht?
 Believe it yes: There are a thousand stories
 Of wonderous loyall women, that have slipt,
 But it has been e're the ice of tender honour
 That kept 'em coole still to the world; I think
 You are blest, that have such an occasion in your hands
 To beget a Chronicle, a faithfull one.
 (4.3.37-50)

Cassandra poses her defence of Evanthe taking action within a narrative of rape. Yet, she also suggests that women who are victims of rape take action as they yield to men's advances, and therefore their stories are ones of action and pleasure. Cassandra spins her argument in such a way to convince Evanthe that taking action (yielding to Frederick) to save her life and Valerio's, would be noble. She persuades Evanthe to the point that she responds, asking: 'But suppose this, wench, / The King should so delight me with his company, / I should forget my Lord, and no more look on him' (4.3.55-7). DiGangi notes that '[c]ompelling stage bawds do not passively infect other women with sexual desire or sexual disease. They seduce women by evoking moral commonplaces that make illicit relations appear both attractive and familiar'.⁷⁵ Cassandra's defence evokes moral virtue to normalise illicit action. She looks forward to a future in which Evanthe will be remembered, and even idolised, for taking action.

However, Cassandra's own action – manipulating Evanthe to have sex with the King – ultimately results in her demise. Cassandra over-divulges, offering too much information:

there be some Ladies
 [...]

 That have had the blessedness to try his body,
 That I have heard proclaime him a new Hercules
 [...]

⁷⁵ DiGangi, p. 171.

There will be the danger,
You being but a young and tender Lady
Although your mind be good, yet your weak Body
At first encounter too, to meet with one
Of his unconquer'd strength –
(4.3.60-68)

It is because Cassandra is too familiar with such intimacies and encourages too much action, that Evanthe shuts her down: 'Peace thou rude bawde, / Thou studied old corruptnesse, tye thy tongue up' (4.3.68-9). When Cassandra defends herself, stating – 'I did not bid you sin' – Evanthe's response draws on stereotypes of older single women to single out her illicit action: 'Thou wood'st me to it, / Thou that art fit for prayer and the grave, / Thy body earth already, and corruption, / Thou taught'st the way' (4.3.186-9). It is Cassandra's encouragement to act and seize the moment that Evanthe takes issue with. Evanthe then dismisses Cassandra from her service, putting an end to her extended delay but leaving her without a structured future.

The play concludes with Evanthe successfully navigating the temporal limitations Frederick, Valerio, and Cassandra try to impose on her. In a whirlwind of scenes, she first punishes Cassandra for encouraging haste and action. As a result, Cassandra does not progress socially: 'By this fair light, / If e'er I see thee more [...] I'll spoil thy Bawdery [...] Be gone, I charge thee leave me' (4.3.96-101). Evanthe then again imposes waiting on Frederick as she maintains and performs her role as a patient and loyal wife, placing him in a state of extended delay: 'This little fort you seek, I shall man nobly / And strongly too, with chaste obedience / To my dear lord' (4.3.222-4). Finally, she reprimands Valerio not only for lying about his impotence but also for delaying their time together and ultimately, for removing her ability to determine her own future: 'And was not I as worthy to die nobly? / What weakness, Sir, [...] do you see in me [...] To defraud me / Of such an opportunity?' (4.5.34-9). Evanthe does not position her earlier eagerness to consummate their marriage as an immoral act – as it was a natural and legal step in

the progression of marriage – but rather marks Valerio’s denial as transgressive. Although Evanthe presents herself to Frederick as the chaste and obedient wife, when alone with Valerio in private, she critiques his actions, noting ‘thou hast done me / A scurvy Courtisie, that has undone me’ (4.5.57-8).⁷⁶ Throughout the play, as Evanthe seeks to pave her own future, she must grapple with the ways in which waiting is obstructive when imposed by another. And yet, she too discovers how by performing waiting, she can actively employ it as a form of resistance. It is through various forms of waiting – both the temporal act itself, as well as waiting as a form of service – that Evanthe shapes her future. In the play’s final scene, Evanthe manipulates Frederick’s temporal restrictions by imposing them on him. She can find no man amongst the crowd willing to marry her and agree to the King’s terms and conditions (that they too will only keep her as a wife for a month, and then die). As Frederick reminds Evanthe that her life can be saved if she but yields to him, she cunningly asks him if he would be willing to follow his own conditions: ‘On that condition if I had it certain, / I would be your any thing, and you should enjoy me [...] But when your Time came how I should rejoice [...] To see your throat cut’ (5.3.164-8). Evanthe suggests that she will yield to him if he will but agree to his own conditions. She manipulates his own temporal limitations to successfully save her and Valerio’s lives.

In *A Wife for a Month*, Fletcher draws on tropes and themes from his own past collaboration with Shakespeare to structure a new narrative. The play not only reconfigures the women in *Henry VIII*, but also its attention to gender, time, and service. Whereas the elite female servants in *Henry VIII* are not featured so prominently, as the protagonist, Evanthe’s actions – and waiting – take centre stage. In many ways, *A Wife for a Month* parodies Fletcher’s earlier

⁷⁶ Evanthe does come to forgive Valerio, but it occurs after he ‘weeps’ and claims he will ‘do no more’ (4.5.59).

collaborative piece. There is little difference between the characters of Henry and Frederick, other than Frederick more explicitly expresses his sexual urges. Although Frederick appears as a caricature of Henry, both men encourage the elite female servants to act, and the women are then forced to navigate such temporal impositions. *A Wife for a Month*, like *Henry VIII*, highlights key issues of the interplay between the past, present, and future, but directs its attention to how these concerns affect the women. The ways in which age and gender are constructed in service, particularly in the juxtaposition between Evanthe and Cassandra, speak to how early modern society envisioned the passive waiting period in service and the ways in which women take action to shape it to their own liking. When both haste and delay are imposed on elite female servants, it is how they manage these extreme temporal forms which either prolongs their current state or enables them to manipulate temporality to claim agency. However, as the play makes clear, the act of imposing temporal restrictions for one's own self-interest does not often result in the desired future one initially sought to achieve. *A Wife for a Month* demonstrates how women fashion their own future through the act of waiting. However, an elite female servant's specific temporal experience is ultimately linked to the construction of her gender, status, age, and sexual identity.

At the end of *Love's Labour's Lost*, Berowne observes how the women's deferrals of marriage result in inconclusive and uncertain futures for the men: 'Our wooing doth not end like an old play: / Jack hath not Jill. These ladies' courtesy / Might well have made our sport a comedy' (5.2.862-4). Berowne's stark acknowledgement that the women's response was not what he had expected demonstrates how the anticipated future can easily be affected by unpredictable action. As the women impose waiting on the men, they not only manipulate the limitations of elite

female service and its intentional delay, but also manipulate female rule to benefit their own futures. The Princess employs her own noble position to delay marriage, and in doing so, her women are able to follow suit. It is the women's ability to defer marriage that renders the conventional comedic ending – often featuring a wedding or the clear promise of one – untenable. Their delay affects the generic outcome of the play.

Throughout the unfixed duration of service, how an individual waits affects the delay in a way that annuls or tempers their desired future. Service, as I have shown, was purposed as a period of socially imposed delay in which women were forced to wait for their future (marriage) to occur. However, it was during this in-between period of expected inaction in which early modern drama portrays women being empowered to act, seizing the moment to determine their own futures. In this chapter, I have argued that the temporal framework of elite female service is often used to limit and hinder women's natural social progression, and yet it is through such a framework, and the waiting it necessitates, that they are empowered to take action. Derrida's deconstructive work on *s'attendre*, *différance*, and *future* and *l'avenir* serves as a productive lens through which to analyse service as he encourages us to look between set binaries at the complications, negotiations, and nuances that arise. Consideration of the temporal nature of the service contract and the ways in which service is inextricably linked to the future-oriented promise of marriage demonstrates how the temporal ambiguities of service leave room for elite female servants to actively change their current state. However, in both *Henry VIII* and *A Wife for a Month*, the question of when it is justifiable for women to take action arises. The elite female servants are left to decide whether they should passively and patiently wait in service for the promise of their future or if they should seize the moment and take action. In *Henry VIII*, we see that it is through passive waiting that Anne achieves preferment, and linearly progresses

through the period of service. The Old Lady, in contrast, is stuck in a period of socially imposed delay and takes action to change her current state. Similarly, in *A Wife for a Month*, Cassandra decides to take action to leave her state of extended delay, but that action conflicts with the passive waiting her mistress seeks to maintain. Evanthe, on the other hand, is left questioning whether to accept death and passively wait for an expected future or whether to take action and change that future. Reading service as a temporal experience can help us to understand how an elite female servant's desired future impacts their present actions and how they resist service's limitations to claim agency. In this chapter I have explored how the temporal experience of waiting can shape the service experience. I have sought to rethink elite female servants not just as characters whose sole purpose is to enable those they serve, but as characters who strive to shape their own desired futures. If we do not consider the temporal experience of waiting and what the waiting period of service entails, we may misread or ignore an elite female servant's dramatic significance.

Chapter Two: Sexuality, Status and the Economics of Service in *The Changeling* and *All's Well That Ends Well*

As I have discussed in the Introduction, there is a critical tendency to hyper-sexualise and misread the social status of an elite female servant. For example, *The Changeling*'s Diaphanta has been described as having an 'animal sexuality', a 'lustful sexuality', and it has been suggested that her lack of sexual fears 'underscores her lower class'.¹ The scholarly habit of reading elite female servants – and Diaphanta is certainly elite – as lower-class, disruptive, and sexually deviant discounts the social, economic, and political implications of their involvement in various forms of exchange. Diaphanta engages in her mistress's bed trick to reap the economic rewards of a dowry. Her exclamation following the agreement between the two women, 'The bride's place, / And with a thousand ducats! I'm for a justice now -- / I bring a portion with me, I scorn small fools', underscores not only her sexual desire ('the bride's place'), but also her financial desire ('a thousand ducats!'), and her social desire to marry upwards ('I'm for a justice now [...] I scorn small fools') (4.1.125-127).² Reading Diaphanta as an elite female servant allows us to recognise how social and economic incentives influence the way in which she performs service, engages with networks of exchange, and how, ultimately, her status shapes her identity within the world of the play. Rather than assuming the lower social status of these women, and solely attending to their sexual transgressions as critics have been prone to do, I propose that we instead acknowledge the elite status of these characters and consider how status informs the ways an emerging capitalist economy constructs them as objects of sexual exchange, free to be used by

¹ Joost Daalder, 'The Role of Diaphanta in *The Changeling*' in *Journal of the Australian Universities Modern Language Association*, 1991; 76, pp. 13-21, p. 18; Michelle M. Dowd, 'Desiring Subjects: Staging the Female Servant in Early Modern Tragedy' in *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, eds. Natasha Korda and Michelle M. Dowd (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), pp. 131-144, p. 140; Judith Haber, "'I(t) could not choose but follow': Erotic Logic in *The Changeling*' in *Representations*, vol. 81, no. 1, 2003, pp. 79-98, p. 81.

² Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, ed. Michael Neill (London, New York: Methuen Drama, 2019). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the play will be taken from this edition.

both masters and mistresses. As I will demonstrate, it is through networks of exchange, both sexual and economic, that these elite characters are able to participate in a nascent capitalist economy to achieve social mobility.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which elite female servants are valued within an early capitalist economy and how they negotiate and manipulate their perceived worth to cultivate social mobility. In Chapter One I considered women's experience within the complex "service life cycle", and in this chapter I will analyse how elite women endeavour to leave service by engaging in networks of exchange, be it economic, sexual, or political. What is missing from scholarship to date is the consideration of an *elite* female servant's place in the early modern economy and the ways in which her social status and elite household position allow for her to negotiate and manipulate her commodity status within forms of exchange. To address what I contend is the hitherto unexplored interplay between elite status, sexuality, and the economy in female service, I examine Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622) and Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* (1603-4). Neither Diaphanta nor Helen have been often read as elite female servants, nor have their actions been analysed in direct relation to the nascent early modern capitalist economy. Considering elite female servants from an economic perspective reveals how the emerging economy shaped the various exchanges in which they participated as elite women and as both objects and agents in the transaction. Scrutiny of Diaphanta and Helen raises three questions central to the focus of this chapter: how are they, as both elite servants and virgins, regarded as property in the early modern economy? How do they manipulate their commodity status to benefit from such exchanges? How does their involvement in bed tricks challenge and resist nascent capitalist systems of value?

This chapter draws on a body of new economic criticism, gender studies, and service scholarship, synthesizing insights made in each field in order to scrutinise concepts of value and exchange within elite female service. If the study of female service in early modern literature is sparse, work which attends to the importance of elite status, sexuality and economics in female service is practically non-existent. However, central to my research is Katherine Gillen's *Chaste Value*, which considers chastity's commodity status within an emerging capitalist economy. Gillen demonstrates how the literature of the period often conflates a woman's worth with her sexual status, be it her virginity or constancy to her husband. She explains how '[i]n the early capitalist economy, this form of property [virginity] was often conceived as a commodity, an entity defined primarily by its exchange value'.³ As she situates dramatic representations of chastity within larger social concerns about the effects of early modern capitalism, she underscores how the economy articulated distinctions and similarities between human and economic value. I draw on Gillen's analysis of virginity's commodity status as the determinant of a woman's worth within the early modern economy to consider how elite female servants were valued when their virginity was coupled with their status as elite servants. Amanda Bailey's work on debt bondage is also of immense help as she observes how servants' 'oath[s] of service granted their masters some degree of authority over their lives'.⁴ Bailey analyses how both money and bodies were conceived as kinds of property and how they impinged upon one another in moments of economic tension.⁵ I utilise this to consider how, because elite servants were temporarily bound to the household in which they served, they were understood to be in the

³ Katherine Gillen, *Chaste Value: Economic Crisis, Female Chastity and the Production of Social Difference on Shakespeare's Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 4.

⁴ Amanda Bailey, *Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 103

⁵ Bailey, p. 3.

possession of their master or mistress, and could be conceived as a ‘quasi-property’.⁶ This quasi-property status is further established by the fact that servants required permission from their mistress or master to marry and leave service, thus indicating that servants were within the possession of the household in which they served. As I will demonstrate, this complicates the construction of an elite female servant’s identity within the household as she is perceived to be both an object of exchange and an elite woman with agency.

In addition to Gillen’s work on sexuality and Bailey’s work on the corporeal nature of debt bondage within an emerging capitalist system, this chapter also draw on Natasha Korda and Michelle Dowd’s collection, *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, which examines the depiction of labour in connection with the early modern economy in early modern drama. Their work considers how ‘[r]eputation and social identity were not solely interiorized or ephemeral concepts, but were intimately connected to the everchanging economic and material conditions and cultural discourses that shaped or interpellated working subjects’.⁷ Dowd’s chapter in this collection on domestic female service in *The Changeling* and *The Witch of Edmonton* proposes that ‘[t]he notion of a seamless trajectory for female servants leading from work to marriage was thus more social fantasy than reality’.⁸ As she considers the sexuality of female servants, she draws attention to their ambiguous and vulnerable position within a volatile service economy. Although individual studies have considered the place of women, their labour, their sexuality, and their social status within a nascent capitalist economy, none have yet brought these lines of inquiry into a critical dialogue. I propose that within economies of service, the

⁶ Bailey, p. 63.

⁷ Michelle M. Dowd and Natasha Korda, *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama* (Burlington, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), p. 2.

⁸ Dowd and Korda, p. 12.

identity of a female servant cannot be understood outside its intersection with gender, social status, and sexuality.

As both *The Changeling* and *All's Well* demonstrate, it is through networks of exchange that elite female servants play an active role in an early capitalist economy. Whether it be Helen curing the King of his fistula in exchange for a husband, or Diaphanta agreeing to give up her virginity in a bed trick in exchange for a dowry, both women engage in economic exchanges. Juxtaposing *The Changeling* with *All's Well* highlights the complex dynamics of female status within the economy, particularly the ways in which women of higher social status are capable of successfully manipulating their commodity status to their advantage, whereas those of a lower social status are more easily subordinated by economic structures. I begin this chapter with *The Changeling* to consider how Diaphanta is valued within the play's economies. Drawing on new economic criticism to examine how the commercial rhetoric of possession dominates descriptions of Diaphanta, I first analyse how Diaphanta is valued by male and female characters to then explore how she navigates nascent capitalist systems of measurements as an elite female servant. Furthermore, although the play's virginity test and bed trick have gathered much critical scrutiny, the economics of Diaphanta's involvement in both has hitherto gone unnoticed. In the latter half of this section, I turn my attention to the bed trick trope. Because bed tricks are sexual exchanges in which the 'tricked' is seemingly unaware that they have been deceived, the trope raises questions about how bodies were understood, valued, and trafficked in the early modern period. In my examination of *The Changeling*, I demonstrate how women use the bed trick to manipulate patriarchal measurements of value.

Turning to *All's Well That Ends Well*, I then examine how Helen engages in the early modern economy by manipulating her dual status as a virgin and as an elite servant to achieve

her social aspirations. I first consider how Helen is valued for her virginity to show how she then resists objectification. She does not participate in service, economic, or sexual exchanges as a passive object, but is rather an active agent who seeks to determine her own worth. Analysing how Helen is valued within exchanges further establishes the ways in which capitalist appreciations of value can be manipulated. This becomes most explicit in Helen's exchange with the Florentine women and the subsequent bed trick. As I will show, Helen's use of the bed trick as a form of sexual and economic exchange exemplifies how elite female servants can benefit from determining and manipulating their own sense of value. In this section, I return to the 'Middling Culture' stratifications of status, using it as a framework for thinking of the relationships between Helen, Bertram, and the Florentine women, and how status influences dynamics of power.

By examining the economics of female service, this chapter demonstrates how elite female servants participate in the changing economic landscape by negotiating their own value to progress socially. Both Diaphanta and Helen hold elite service positions as a waiting woman and as a waiting gentlewoman; although they may be household subordinates, their elite social status enables them to negotiate and benefit from forms of political, sexual, and economic exchange. Both women also commoditise their virginity, deliberately transforming it from the determinant of their worth into an object of exchange: this allows them to actively participate in economic transactions with both men and women. And finally, both women engage in bed tricks which would, ideally, enable them to cultivate social mobility, offering them a way out of their current position. As is made clear in both plays, elite female servants are acutely aware of their commodity status and the market value of their virginity and manipulate modes of exchange to achieve their social ambitions.

Changing and Exchanging in *The Changeling*

We are first introduced to Diaphanta by Jasperino (Alsemero's friend), who upon catching sight of her, exclaims: 'Methinks I should do something too: I mean to be a venturer in this voyage. Yonder's another vessel, I'll board her – if she be lawful prize, down goes her top-sail' (1.1.84-87). By positioning himself as a 'venturer in this voyage', Jasperino turns his sexual pursuit of Diaphanta into a commercial enterprise.⁹ As Jasperino's metaphor suggests, and as Sandra Fischer has argued, in the early modern period, economics 'begins to penetrate all human relations: money becomes the only way of assessing value, profit the only impetus for human action'.¹⁰ Economics infringed on everyday life: capitalist measurements of assessing value extended from property to people; social relations, too, were framed as commercial enterprises. Gillen suggests this new economic system instantiated 'new modes of thinking that considered objects, actions, ideas and people in terms of the money they could garner'.¹¹ The emerging economy transformed the way in which value was measured and articulated. Rather than assessing value qualitatively, the valuation of worth shifted towards a comparative, quantitative approach, which, as David Hawkes notes, 'evaluates things by their relation to other things'.¹² As human interactions were compared to economic relations, words which defined identity and human value took on economic meanings.

⁹ Clare McManus notes that these lines are 'itself reworking *Othello* 1.2.49-50', in which Cassio asks Iago, 'Ensign, what makes he here?' and Iago replies, 'Faith, he tonight hath boarded a land carrack: / If it prove lawful prize, he's made for ever'. See Clare McManus, "'Constant Changelings', Theatrical Form, and Migration: Stage Travel in the Early 1620s' in *Travel and Drama in Early Modern England*, eds. Claire Jowett and David McManus (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 2018), pp. 207-229, p. 214.

¹⁰ Sandra Fischer, *Econolingua: A Glossary of Coins and Economic Language in Renaissance Drama* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1985), p. 16.

¹¹ Gillen, p. 3.

¹² David Hawkes, *Shakespeare and Economic Theory* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), p. 16.

As Jasperino positions himself as a venturer, ‘one who undertakes or shares in a commercial or trading venture’, he both objectifies and sexualises Diaphanta within the rhetoric of commercial enterprise, reducing her to a commodity.¹³ Bradley Ryner’s work on the recurring metaphor of ‘venturing’ within *The Changeling* argues that it ‘conceptually links transactions in the play to international currency exchanges’ and furthermore, that the rhetoric of exchange has both commercial and erotic connotations.¹⁴ Jasperino describes Diaphanta as the ‘vessel’ through which he can participate in a commercial enterprise. She is notably not valued as the place or thing that will be dominated, but as the vehicle which will enable his sexual pleasure. Early modern drama is riddled with metaphors comparing women to spaces which can be conquered or possessed.¹⁵ In *Cymbeline*, when Iachimo speaks of his ‘voyage upon’ Imogen, he similarly links her body with mercantile enterprise (1.5.155). Jasperino, too, couples commercialism with female sexuality to underscore the nature of his business. Diaphanta is an economic investment, and it is through boarding her, claiming possession of her chastity and her body, that he will profit.

The valuation of property and people in early modern drama, particularly the measurement and vendibility of women, is suggestive of a changing, economically driven society in which consumerism and materiality dictated the evaluation of worth. When Jasperino acknowledges that ‘if she be lawful prize, down goes her top-sail’, he suggests that Diaphanta is only of value to him so long as she is a lawful prize – that is, a true virgin. If Diaphanta is a legitimate commodity, if she is both a virgin and unmarried (not under the ownership of a

¹³ ‘venturer, n. 2’, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press < www.oed.com/view/Entry/222308 > [Accessed 14.02.2022].

¹⁴ Bradley Ryner, *Performing Economic Thought: English Drama and Mercantile Writing, 1600-1642* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 72, 82.

¹⁵ For further examples, see Patricia Parker’s chapter ‘Rhetorics of Property: Exploration, Inventory, Blazon’ in *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London, New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 140-146.

husband), then he can possess her; if not, then she lacks value and is of no use to him. However, as I will shortly demonstrate, service and social status complicate an elite female servant's role in sexual and economic exchanges, as she acquires the authority to determine the value of her virginity.

Jasperino positions Diaphanta's virginity within an economic discourse illustrating how her value is determined by her chastity. Chastity, as Gillen suggests, 'in both its virginal and married forms' constitutes 'the entirety of a woman's value'.¹⁶ In the early modern period, women's bodies and their virginity were conceived of as objects of exchange. Because the contract of marriage is an exchange of property, passing the virgin (commodity) from father or master (owner) to husband (buyer), women's bodies function as a medium of exchange and are assigned a commodity status. Emily C. Gerstell notes that '[t]he state of being a virgin allows the virgin's body to be transformed into value'.¹⁷ However, virginity exists as a peculiar commodity in the sense that it has no universal market value; unlike the trafficking of material goods, it can only be possessed once and cannot be circulated. Jasperino can only 'board' (possess) Diaphanta if she is readily available and has not yet been exchanged. However, as Gillen observes, 'Jasperino depicts Diaphanta as a conquest who will enrich her possessor so long as she is "lawful" – a judgement call that men in *The Changeling* find especially difficult to make'.¹⁸ As Jasperino links the narrative of sexual commerce with commercial discourses he draws attention to the instability of assessing the value of women.

¹⁶ Gillen, p. 5.

¹⁷ Emily C. Gerstell, 'All's [Not] Well: Female Service and 'Vendible' Virginity in Shakespeare's Problem Play' in *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, n. 4 (2015), pp. 187-211, p. 208.

¹⁸ Gillen, pp. 110-111.

I am interested in examining how, as Jasperino courts Diaphanta, he constructs her through metaphors of mercantile possession and medical illness. Although these were relatively common ways of constructing women in the period, what differs in this instance is that it is Diaphanta's status as an elite female servant which makes her a valuable commodity to Jasperino. Jasperino flirts with Diaphanta, declaring himself to be a 'mad wag' (1.1.132). John Florio's *A World of Words* (1598) describes 'wag' to be a synonym for 'a pirate', or 'robber by sea or land'.¹⁹ Immediately, by claiming to be 'a mad wag', Jasperino displays his intentions, linking them with piracy and possession. Jasperino's 'voyage' is shaped by the threat of piracy and lawless desire. However, Diaphanta evades his advances by turning his mercantile rhetoric into medicinal discourse; she ignores his suggestions and instead considers his claim of madness. She advises him that 'we have a doctor in the city that undertakes the cure of such' (1.1.133-4). As Jasperino dismisses her advice he builds upon her medicinal rhetoric to link it with his sexual desires: 'Tush, I know what physic is best for the state of mine own body' (1.1.135). Jasperino positions his sexual needs within the framework of an exchange: if she gives herself to him then he will be cured of his madness. In a play whose plot partially hinges on madness, the medical rhetoric used throughout is full of erotic and economic connotations. When Jasperino insists that if 'we two would compound together, and if it did not tame the maddest blood I'th'town for two hours after, I'll ne'er profess physic again', he depicts Diaphanta as the only cure for his madness. (1.1.144-6). In the next section, I give more attention to how medicinal cures are situated within the framework of economic exchanges in *All's Well*, but in *The Changeling* it is important to understand how Jasperino limits Diaphanta's value to her sexuality. It is through use of her body that he believes he will

¹⁹ John Florio, *A World of Words* (London, 1598).

profit (achieve sexual pleasure). Yet, as I will shortly demonstrate, it is not through Diaphanta's sexuality that Jasperino profits, but rather through access to her as an elite female servant, privy to her mistress's secrets. As Diaphanta, once again, dismisses his advances, she recommends he take a 'poppy', an opiate, to sleep. He responds, 'Poppy? I'll give thee a pop i'th'lips for that first and begin there', turning her use of poppy as a cure into a physical action: a kiss (1.1.142). As Jasperino physically forces himself on her, he is momentarily cured of his madness and can pause his conquest. Having successfully possessed Diaphanta, he quickly returns to his mercantile metaphor, stating: 'I'll discover no more now' (1.1.144). The language of possession resonates with Jasperino's action of sexual assault. The erotic connotations associated with the medical rhetoric depict a narrative of sexual commerce in which Diaphanta's sexuality is an object to be possessed.

Whereas Jasperino is limited in his thinking of women as he focuses on the value of Diaphanta in terms of sex, Alsemero recognises the nuance and value of her position as Beatrice Joanna's waiting woman. At the beginning of act two scene two, Diaphanta conducts Alsemero to Beatrice Joanna's private quarters so he may engage in an illicit affair with her mistress. Diaphanta remarks, '[t]his place is my charge', claiming some ownership over the concealed space (2.2.1). 'This place' that Diaphanta speaks of is a feminised, private space; her access to it allows for Alsemero to advance in his pursuit of Beatrice Joanna.²⁰ As an elite female servant, Diaphanta is offered privileges that come with her household role; her position as Beatrice Joanna's waiting woman provides her with intimate knowledge of and access to the castle's private spaces. Alsemero recognizes Diaphanta's value to her mistress when he acknowledges,

²⁰ For more on the spatial mobility of women and men in *The Changeling* see Jean Howard's chapter 'Space, Gender and the Rules of Movement in *The Changeling*' in *The Changeling: The State of Play*, eds. Gordon McMullan and Kelly Stage (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2022), pp. 23-41.

‘[t]hese women are their ladies’ cabinets, / Things of most precious trust are locked into ‘em’ (2.2.6-7). He describes Diaphanta as the keeper of her mistress’s secrets coupling her household position to an elite and valuable space. Cabinets were personal chests owned by elite women; they were notably characterised by their layers of secrecy. Although, at first glance, cabinets appeared to hold only what was visible to the observer, intricate hidden spaces, only known to the owner, hid precious possessions. Michelle O’Callaghan observes that the cabinet, ‘like the lady’s maid, was particular to elite households. Both, in a sense, are signifiers for the private life of the gentry and aristocracy in that they are typically represented on stage and in literary texts as the keepers or repositories of secrets’.²¹ Cabinets were not only spaces of value because they held treasured objects, but also spaces where women could claim pure ownership over their possessions.²² By comparing Diaphanta to her mistress’s cabinet, Alsemero acknowledges the value and intimate secrecy she holds within.

Alsemero seems to instantly recognise Diaphanta’s political value, in that, as an elite female servant, she is able to covertly orchestrate their affair. However, it takes Beatrice Joanna some time to fully comprehend the value of her servant’s elite and chaste status. Aware that Alsemero will notice the absence of her virginity on their wedding night, Beatrice Joanna proclaims that, ‘[t]here’s no venturing / Into his bed’ (4.1.11-12). Yet, as Ryner suggests, “‘venturing” in the economic sense, is precisely what she does by paying the virginal Diaphanta to take her place’.²³ It is only because Beatrice Joanna fears she cannot fake the physical proof of her chastity, that she recognises Diaphanta’s value as a waiting woman. As Diaphanta stumbles

²¹ Michelle O’Callaghan, *Thomas Middleton: Renaissance Dramatist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 142-3.

²² Many thanks to Isabella Rosner for a productive conversation on the material culture of cabinets.

²³ Bradley Ryner, ‘Anxieties of Currency Exchange in Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling*’ in *Money, Morality and Culture in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Juliann Vitullo and Diane Wolfthal (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 109-25, p. 116.

upon her mistress in Alsemero's private closet, Beatrice Joanna acknowledges the potential of her value: 'Seeing that wench now, / A trick comes in my mind: 'tis a nice piece / Gold cannot purchase' (4.1.53-55). Beatrice Joanna commoditises her servant as 'a nice piece', linking Diaphanta's body (and chastity) with coinage. However, this description is contradictory in its nature, both appreciating the potential value of her servant while nevertheless objectifying her. Our contemporary understanding of 'nice', which is used to indicate a positive description of something pleasant or pleasing, was not the associated definition until the 1800s. Early definitions, such as in Randle Cotgrave's *A Dictionary of the French and English Tongues* (1611), indicate a negative behaviour: '[I]ither, lazie, sloathfull, idle; faint, slacke; dull, simple'.²⁴ Furthermore, the word 'piece' suggested a fragment or portion of gold or silver, transformed into a physical coin.²⁵ By labelling Diaphanta 'a nice piece', Beatrice Joanna simultaneously objectifies her chaste status, hinting at the qualities which add to her worth (her conduct and reputation), while also drawing attention to her potential for corruption. The economic rhetoric of Diaphanta's description frames Beatrice Joanna's 'trick' as a commercial enterprise; although she acknowledges that money should not be able to buy virginity, that is precisely what she intends to do.

Before Beatrice Joanna can engage Diaphanta in her 'trick', she must be certain that her waiting woman is, in fact, a virgin. It is not only Diaphanta's elite position as a waiting woman which perfectly positions her to act as Beatrice Joanna's proxy, but also her chaste status. As I have discussed in the Introduction, an elite female servant's household position relies, in part, on her virginity. The institution of service was structured so the household would watch over, and in

²⁴ Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionary of the French and English Tongues* (London, 1611), Iii6v.

²⁵ 'piece, n. 1b', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press < www.oed.com/view/Entry/143547 > [Accessed 21.03.2022].

essence, control the elite female servant's body until she was deemed ready for marriage. As it was expected that the household would give their servants permission to marry, ultimately allowing them to leave service, an elite female servant's mistress had near-total control over her subordinate's body and commodity status. However, exchanges that occur during the service period raise questions of ownership over bodies; who holds absolute ownership over an elite female servant's body, the servant herself or the household?

The 'trick' that Beatrice Joanna proposes scrutinises this very issue. As a commodity, virginity acquires value in the marriage market because it determines the legitimacy of heirs to familial titles and property. Virginity, or the appearance of virginity, as Jean Howard notes, 'secures the property value of a high-born woman in the marriage transactions arranged by her father'.²⁶ Gillen, too, observes that 'the need to positively identify offspring led to a social and legal system that considered women's sexuality an element of male property'.²⁷ Although a woman's sexuality was considered 'male property' in that it she was passed from father or master to husband, as we see in early modern drama, an elite female servant's virginity could be male *or* female property: a master could possess a servant and take her virginity, but a mistress could use or exchange that servant's virginity for her own self-interest.²⁸ The exchange that occurs in this play underscores the complicated dynamics of female status and networks of service. Women who hold a more elite social status have the ability to monetise the price of virginity and manipulate the system to their advantage. As we will see in *All's Well*, it is Helen's newly acquired status as a count's wife which allows her to negotiate the bed trick exchange with the

²⁶ Howard, 'Space and Gender', p. 30.

²⁷ Gillen, p. 4.

²⁸ For more on the vulnerability of female servants, see Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Mendelson and Crawford's *Women in Early Modern England* (1998), and Michelle Dowd's chapter in *Working Subjects* (2010).

lower status Florentine women. In *The Changeling*, it is Beatrice Joanna's elite and authoritative status which allows her to determine the value of Diaphanta's commodity status. However, she must first test the legitimacy of Diaphanta's chastity if she is to use her as a proxy. Not only will Diaphanta's virginity secure Beatrice Joanna's own transaction in marriage but it will also determine the legitimacy of the mistress and servant's agreement.

Through exchange, objects are viewed as either commodities or gifts. A gift is something that can be given away (but only once), whereas a commodity is something that can be bought (but is then removed from market circulation). The difference between commodity-exchange and gift-exchange is that the first is an exchange for profit, and the latter an exchange without the assurance or assumption of a return.²⁹ In the case of *The Changeling*, Beatrice Joanna and Diaphanta engage in a commodity-exchange in which Beatrice Joanna will profit from her servant's sexual services, and Diaphanta will profit financially. However, this exchange is complicated by Diaphanta's status as both the object of exchange and as an agent in the transaction. Feminist theorists such as Gayle Rubin and Luce Irigaray have studied the "traffic in women" in marriage, and their status as gifts or commodities. Rubin contends that "[i]f women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents,

²⁹ This field has been heavily studied by scholars and theorists alike. Derrida's theories of gift exchange propose that an absolutely 'pure' gift is impossible, for the giving or receiving invites a structure of debt and restitution. Derrida's work, in many ways, contradicts studies by Marcel Mauss and Claude Levi-Strauss. Mauss's anthropological study *The Gift* describes how gift-exchange dominates and regulates social relations in 'primitive societies' which lack much real, physical capital. He describes how gift exchange is not solely economic, but also has political, religious, and social significance. Mauss locates the gift's value in its social bonds, and includes people (women, children) in his definition of exchange. Claude Levi-Strauss builds upon Mauss's work to argue that women are the ultimate form of the gift. He positions women as objects of exchange, who in marriage, are intended to affirm male familial bonds. See Marcell Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), p. 5; Jaques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992); Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, 2016).

upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage'.³⁰ Rubin critiques Levi-Strauss and Mauss and their objectification of women, to propose that if a woman is the object, then she cannot play a conscious role in the exchange. Irigaray, likewise, has argued against Marx to propose that women are exchanged within the sexual economy as commodities, not as gifts. She suggests that the social order is preserved by objectifying women 'within an exchange system that prohibits their occupying position of subject'.³¹ Irigaray considers the virginal woman to represent 'pure exchange value' in that once she is 'deflowered, woman is relegated to the status of use value, to her entrapment in private property; she is removed from exchange among men'.³² However, I suggest that Diaphanta, as an elite female servant, is able to refute her passive position within the typical patriarchal exchange system, which would not permit her to occupy the role of the desiring subject, to acquire control over her own commodity status and value. It is through Beatrice Joanna's bed trick that Diaphanta is not only able to participate in a nascent capitalist economy but also to potentially profit economically from exchanging her own virginity: a profit which women do not achieve in the exchange of marriage.

As I have suggested, before the women can agree to the exchange, Beatrice Joanna must assess the value of Diaphanta's commodity status. To substantiate her value, Beatrice Joanna decides to perform Alsemero's virginity test on her servant. In the early modern period, determining the authenticity of a woman's virginity was a catalyst for male anxieties about assessing value. Sarah Luttfiring suggests that 'it was precisely the impossibility of fixing virginity in any single body part or speech act that opened up the potential for even nonvirgins to

³⁰ Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex' in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157–210, p. 174.

³¹ As quoted in Alan D. Schrift's *The Logic of the Gift: Towards an Ethic of Generosity* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 13.

³² Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 186.

exploit virginity's ambiguities and gain control over the interpretation of their bodies'.³³ Because the physical signs of virginity are unreliable, the evaluation of a woman's worth is difficult to discern. Ryner argues that the concerns which the play's characters face are similar to those that arose in the early modern period with issues of valuing and assessing international currency.³⁴ Coinage, like women, was marked by the same binary, viewed as either true or counterfeit, chaste or corrupt. Early modern literature frequently positions women within commercial discourses to accentuate the ways in which men are vulnerable to women's deception, as well as the power women have in determining their value. We see this in Barnabe Rich's *The Excellency of Good Women* (1613), further subtitled 'The honour and estimation that belongeth vnto them. The infallible markes whereby to know them', which seeks to distinguish 'betweene the good woman and the bad'.³⁵ To illustrate the danger of women, Rich links female deception to counterfeit coinage:

Copper is like gold, yet all is not gold that glistereth, and if euill women were not sometimes like to good, which indeed they be not, they could not deceiue so many men as they doe'.³⁶

Rich situates social anxieties around the inability to decipher a woman's value within an economic metaphor. Gillen notes that 'early modern drama repeatedly invokes virginity to connote authenticity'.³⁷ Unlike coinage which can be weighed and assigned an intrinsic value, the physical signs of virginity are unreliable, and therefore it is difficult to assign value to its commodity status. By comparing women to coinage, Rich acknowledges the power women have to obscure their true value by eliminating men's ability to interpret the truth. As I will

³³ Sarah Luttring, 'Bodily Narratives and the Politics of Virginity in the Changeling and the Essex Divorce', in *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 39, 2011, pp. 97-128, p. 98.

³⁴ See Ryner, p. 92.

³⁵ Barnabe Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women* (London, 1613), p. 1,5.

³⁶ Rich, p. 23.

³⁷ Gillen, p. 9.

demonstrate, elite female servants verify these counterfeit anxieties as they discover the authority to determine their own market value.

In *The Changeling*, Beatrice Joanna encourages Diaphanta to undergo Alsemero's virginity test in order to determine the authenticity of her chaste status, which will then legitimise Diaphanta's commodity status within their exchange. Luttfiring suggests that methods of determining virginity relied on a woman's performance of chastity; she explains that '[o]ne such method rested on the assumption that a woman's outward appearance and conduct would mirror her inner physical state'.³⁸ As Beatrice Joanna scrutinises the sincerity of Diaphanta's chastity – 'I fear thou art not modest', 'You're too quick, I fear, to be a maid' – she draws attention to how Diaphanta's sexual interest in this exchange could indicate an unchaste status (4.1.63,92). However, Diaphanta rebukes her mistress's insinuation: 'How? Not a maid? Nay, then you urge me, madam! / Your honourable self is not a truer / With all your fears upon you – [...] Than I with all my lightsome joys about me' (4.1.93-6). By comparing her own chaste status with what she assumes is her mistress's chastity, Diaphanta underscores how the authenticity of virginity relied on, to use Luttfiring's phrase, women's 'bodily narratives' – the 'stories women told about their sexual status' and 'how they acted these stories out, a combination of verbal and physical performance'.³⁹ Diaphanta reveals the extent to which women could be interchangeable, so long as they both outwardly present as virgins; and yet, she too misreads the signs of virginity in wrongly assuming her mistress to be a virgin. To survey the authenticity of Diaphanta's performance of chastity, Beatrice Joanna employs Alsemero's virginity test, which as Marjorie Garber notes is 'designed to decipher, and thus to control, women's bodies and women's

³⁸ Luttfiring, p. 100.

³⁹ Luttfiring, p. 98.

pleasure'.⁴⁰ However, as Gillen observes, '[e]ven the most straightforward of these tests [...] relied on the interpretation of unstable semiotic signs'.⁴¹ Following the success of Diaphanta's performance (she acts out the "tell-tale signs" of virginity), Beatrice Joanna believes her servant to be a virgin and declares: 'Most honest Diaphanta I dare call thee now' (4.1.118). It is only with proof of Diaphanta's chastity that the exchange between mistress and servant can be legitimised and a price can be assigned to Diaphanta's worth.

Once Beatrice Joanna is satisfied by the confirmation of Diaphanta's chaste status, she continues her 'business': plotting the bed trick (4.1.121). The bed trick trope has gathered much critical scrutiny in relation to issues surrounding its sexual, gendered, and racial deception.⁴² However, what is missing from scholarship to date is consideration of the economic significance of this trope.⁴³ In *The Changeling* and in *All's Well*, the bed trick is an exchange between two women, in which a woman of lower social status agrees to participate in order to reap financial benefits. When Beatrice Joanna proposes that she will give 'a thousand ducats' to the woman who would 'try what my fear were' (sexual intercourse), Diaphanta asks her mistress: 'Would you resign / Your first night's pleasure, and give money too?' (4.1.73-74, 84-85). I argue that Diaphanta agrees to participate in her mistress's device, not out of an obligation of service or

⁴⁰ Marjorie Garber, 'The Insincerity of Women' in *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*, eds. Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 19-38, p. 34.

⁴¹ Gillen, p. 88.

⁴² Prominent bed trick studies include: William R. Bowden, 'The Bed-Trick 1603-1642: Its Mechanics, Ethics, and Effects' in *Shakespeare Studies*, 5 (1969), pp. 112-123; David McCandless, 'Helena's Bed Trick: Gender and Performance in *All's Well That Ends Well*' in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45 (1994), pp. 449-468; Marliiss C. Dessens, *The Bed-trick in English Renaissance Drama: Explorations in Gender, Sexuality, and Power* (Newark, London: University of Delaware Press, 1994); Louise Denmead, 'The Discovery of Blackness in the Early Modern Bed Trick' in *The Invention of Discovery*, ed. James Dougal Fleming (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 153-67; Sylvia Mieszkowski, 'Unauthorized Intercourse: Early Modern Bed Tricks and their Under-Lying Ideologies' in *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 61.4 (2013), pp. 319-340.

⁴³ In Daniel Vitkus's chapter, he considers the interplay between race and economics in the bed trick. However, his focus is not on the economics or gendering of the exchange but on the ways in which it resonates with global trade in the early modern period. See Daniel Vitkus, 'Turning tricks: erotic commodification, cross-cultural conversion, and the bed trick on the English stage, 1580-1630' in *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Simon Ditchfield and Helen Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 236-257.

purely for sexual satisfaction, but for financial gain. Critics have significantly overlooked Diaphanta's involvement in the bed trick. John Higgins proposes that '[t]here's a certain naiveté to Diaphanta's role in both the virginity test and the bed trick born out of her willingness to obey her mistress without question and her desire for reward'.⁴⁴ Higgins portrays Diaphanta as an innocent and malleable woman, whose 'model of service proves unthreatening to the social order'.⁴⁵ Ryner, too, suggests that 'Diaphanta is made into an object by her participation in an exchange she does not fully understand'.⁴⁶ However, I propose that Diaphanta is fully aware of her objectification and role in this exchange, and engages in it as both a desired and as a desiring woman. The fact that she desires to participate, asking her mistress if she is willing to give up her 'first night's pleasure' as well as money in this exchange, complicates her role in the bed trick as she takes on a dual role. She is not passively made into an object of exchange but rather actively positions herself in a way that will allow her to cultivate mobility and achieve her own self-interests of sexual satisfaction. It is notably her elite status, which positions her in close proximity to her mistress and grants her access to the castle's private spaces, coupled with her chaste status that enables this transaction to occur. As a lower status woman and as a woman in service, Diaphanta accepts her mistress's valuation of her worth at one thousand ducats and willingly commodifies her virginity to reap the rewards of a dowry and to hopefully advance out of service.

It is through the bed trick exchange that the play suggests how the emerging capitalist economy was a more liberating system than the feudal system which had preceded it, allowing

⁴⁴ John Higgins, "'Servant obedience changed to master sin': Performance and the Public Transcript of Service in the Overbury Affair and *The Changeling*' in *Service and Servants in Early Modern Europe, 1550-1750*, *Journal for Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 4, eds. William C. Carroll and Jeanne Clegg (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2015), pp. 231-258, p. 249.

⁴⁵ Higgins, p. 249.

⁴⁶ Ryner, *Performing Economic Thought*, p. 96.

individuals to manifest their potential. Because one could achieve social mobility by procuring enough money to acquire a title rather than being born with one, capitalism invited the negotiation of services as a vehicle to procure status and mobility. By agreeing to commodify her virginity, Diaphanta actively participates in the emerging capitalist economy to cultivate social elevation. As she exclaims, ‘I’m for a justice now – / I bring a portion with me, I scorn small fools’ (4.1.126-7), she draws attention to how this exchange offers her the potential to advance herself through a more mobile match, ultimately leaving her service arrangement and acquiring the freedom to select her husband of choice. The early capitalist economy allows for Diaphanta’s self-fashioning: for her to reconstruct her social identity.⁴⁷ Diaphanta is empowered by this new economy to self-commoditise her virginity in order to gain a profit.

Yet, at the same time, it is through the bed trick trope that a critique of capitalist measurements of value emerges. If the nascent capitalist economy was dependent on a quantitative system of measurement, comparing one commodity to another, then the bed trick undermines its value system by removing the visibility of the tricked individual. When one woman is substituted for another, not only is their chaste status imperceptible to male scrutiny, but their social status and race – determinants of social identity – are indiscernible. The bed trick parodies the idea that a woman’s chastity defines her market value; when one woman is substituted for another, undetected by the man, their individuality is compounded. As social constructions of identity – which differentiate a mistress from her servant, or a higher status woman from a lower status woman – are removed, systems of value cease to exist. Because the bed trick relies on the collaboration and exchange of women, and undermines men’s ability to

⁴⁷ The term ‘self-fashioning’ is taken from Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980).

accurately value women, it gives women the agency and authority to determine their own value. As Beatrice Joanna and Diaphanta conflate their identities in the bed trick, they, in essence, disrupt capitalism's arbitrary value system.

The amalgamation of mistress and servant in the bed trick prevents Alsemero from determining either woman's worth. It is precisely because the bed trick happens at night that Alsemero cannot visibly distinguish his wife from her servant, which allows for Diaphanta to appropriate her mistress's identity. When Alsemero later exclaims, 'Oh, cunning devils! / How should blind men know you from fair-faced saints?' (5.3.118-9), he not only draws attention to how the somatic markers of chastity are unreliable but also to men's inability to discern saints from devils, the chaste from the unchaste. Alsemero's racialised language (a point of inquiry to which I will return in Chapter Three), as he acknowledges the impossibility of discerning 'cunning devils' from 'fair-faced saints', sets the mistress and servant both apart and against each other.

Although the market value of female chastity was routinely determined by men, as Alsemero acknowledges, the bed trick restrains men from acquiring absolute authority over women's bodies and their worth. Jaecheol Kim suggests that the valuing of virginity 'is designed to define the sovereign power that men hold over female bodies'.⁴⁸ However, systems of subservience which are put in place to regulate women's bodies and to ensure the legitimacy of property rights are undone by the bed trick as the women determine their own worth, reversing normative measurements of value. In *The Changeling*, the women's use of the bed trick removes the control men maintain over quantifying female worth, leaving the women available to

⁴⁸ Jaecheol Kim, 'The Price of Virginity in the Early Modern Theater: Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*' in *Women's Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 7, pp. 709-726, p. 711. < <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2021.1920412> > [Accessed 14.02.2022].

manipulate and determine their own value and thus capitalise on the oppressive structures of subservience.

In choosing to commodify her virginity, Diaphanta actively participates in the economy as both an object of exchange and as a negotiator of value, as one who is transacted and one who will benefit from the transaction. Although the bed trick recalls the concept of the trafficking in women, it seemingly shows how women reclaim some ownership over their bodies by actively engaging in the exchange. As she appropriates her mistress's identity, Diaphanta undermines the system which defines her value. Her dual status as both an object and agent grants her a certain amount of control over the vendibility of her commodity status and to whom her virginity is given. She discovers agency through the bed trick: money, it seems, not only allows both men and women to purchase virginity but also enables Diaphanta to invest in her future.

Of course, the bed trick ensures a risk element for all participants: both Diaphanta and Beatrice Joanna stand to gain and lose everything depending on its success or failure. By participating in this commodity-exchange, Diaphanta expects the financial rewards she will receive to outweigh the risk. However, when Diaphanta prolongs her time in Alsemero's bed, she changes the course of the agreement. As she waits for Diaphanta to return, Beatrice Joanna exclaims:

Oh my fears,
This strumpet serves her own ends, 'tis apparent now,
Devours the pleasure with a greedy appetite,
And never minds my honour or my peace
(5.1.1-4)

As Diaphanta values her own interests above her mistress's, she threatens Beatrice Joanna's reputation and authority. Beatrice Joanna's swift disposal of her waiting woman (she agrees for DeFlores to murder Diaphanta) emphasises the various ways elite female servants are valued (or

devalued) within the household. Loyal service, it seems, can only get one so far; it is the sacrifices they make for their mistresses that ultimately determine their use-value. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Nerissa agrees to go into isolation with her mistress and then disguise herself and travel to the court, risking their lives, so as to fulfill her mistress's interests. She is then rewarded for her loyalty and her sacrifice, allowed to marry Gratiano and leave service. In Fletcher's *The Pilgrim*, Juletta risks her life, travelling alone in a forest to protect her mistress; she orchestrates the action of the play to further her mistress's interests, and in the end is rewarded with the choice to determine her own path in life. However, in *The Changeling*, Diaphanta performs loyal service to her mistress, but does not sacrifice her own self-interest. She agrees to be exchanged but does not follow the directions agreed upon. Iman Sheeha observes that '*The Changeling* manages the anxieties surrounding the mistress–maidservant alliance by dissolving it'.⁴⁹ Beatrice Joanna murders Diaphanta because she is no longer of use, as either a virgin or a loyal servant.

In *The Changeling*, Diaphanta's elite position as a waiting woman allows for her to participate in various forms of sexual, economic, and political exchange. She engages in a burgeoning capitalist economy, one fixated on self-interest and an individual's social progression through the trope of the bed trick. However, it is the valuing of her own self-interest over her mistress's which the greater household frowns upon. The play's disparaging attitude towards Diaphanta's actions condemns her advances and the ways in which she engages in the exchange. Although she embodies the new age economy, in which one could cultivate advancement by engaging in various forms of exchange and by promoting one's own interest separate from that

⁴⁹ Iman Sheeha, "'Of counsel with [m]y mistress': The mistress-servant alliance in Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622)" in *Cahiers Élisabéthains: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies* 2022, Vol. 107 (1), pp. 4-23, p. 12.

of the household's, the play appears to criticise her capitalist approach to social progression. In the next section, I examine how *All's Well* celebrates Helen's capitalist ways of cultivating social mobility. Whereas Diaphanta is ultimately subordinated by nascent capitalist structures, such economies empower Helen. It is, as we will see, Helen's negotiation of networks of exchange which successfully results in women overpowering patriarchal structures of subservience.

Economies of Exchange in *All's Well That Ends Well*

'Twere all one
That I should love a bright particular star
And think to wed it, he is so above me.
In his bright radiance and collateral light
Must I be comforted, not in his sphere.
Th'ambition in my love thus plagues itself
(1.1.85-90)⁵⁰

At the heart of Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* is a young gentlewoman whose intense desire for social elevation compels her to participate in and negotiate political, sexual, and economic exchanges within networks of service. Helen's opening soliloquy is indeed a hyperbolic declaration of her love for Bertram, but more significantly, it is an expression of her socioeconomic concerns. Central to the play is an apparent divide in status between Bertram and Helen. Helen places Bertram socially 'above' her, and he, in turn, classifies her as a 'poor physician's daughter' (2.3.115). Although Helen claims to have no noble social title – 'I am from humble, he from honoured name; / No note upon my parents, his all noble' – this does not, as we might imagine it would, denote her as lower class (1.3.153-4). Helen is the daughter of 'Gérard de Narbonne' who 'was famous [...] in his profession' as a physician (1.1.24-5). Her father was known by the King who we are told 'very lately spoke of him admiringly and mourningly'

⁵⁰ William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, The Arden Shakespeare Third Series, eds. Suzanne Gossett and Helen Wilcox (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2019).

(1.1.26-7). It is unclear whether Helen's father was a courtier, a court physician, or a well-known physician, but nevertheless, when he was alive, he held the social title of 'gentleman', which in turn, granted Helen the title of 'gentlewoman' as she is so often referred to. However, as I discussed in the Introduction, the title 'gentlewoman' could encompass varying degrees of social status. We know Helen is not part of the 'Established Gentry' as Bertram is, for she makes it clear in the above quote that there is 'no note' upon her family name, and she is therefore an untitled gentlewoman.⁵¹ She could, potentially, be part of what 'Middling Culture' describes as the 'Elite Middling/Upper Gentry', as she is a gentlewoman and the play's text does not indicate whether her family acquired a title at some point. However, she could also be of 'Professional Middling' status because of her father's profession, which as 'Middling Culture' suggests would include 'those defined by a high level of literacy' such as 'doctors' or 'lawyers' who 'might be styled 'gentlemen' or 'gentlewomen''.⁵² Yet, as is noted in this social grouping, those of 'professional middling' status 'rely on the income gained from their profession to survive', 'have no gentry lineage or coats of arms', 'and are sometimes not very wealthy at all'.⁵³ As a gentlewoman and the daughter of a renowned physician, Helen could be assigned to the 'professional middling' status category or she could be of the 'Upper Gentry': however, her exact status is unclear.⁵⁴ Bertram, on the other hand, as a Count would occupy a middling rank in the hierarchy of the nobility (Established Gentry). This places him anywhere from one to three social

⁵¹ Gossett glosses 'note' as a 'sign, token, or indication of some quality, condition' but suggests it can also be related to a 'distinction' or 'importance'. See footnote, 'note', p. 163.

⁵² 'Professional Middling' in 'Middling Culture' <<https://middlingculture.com/social-statuses-of-early-modern-england/#Gentry>> [Accessed 17 August, 2023].

⁵³ 'Professional Middling' in 'Middling Culture' <<https://middlingculture.com/social-statuses-of-early-modern-england/#Gentry>> [Accessed 17 August, 2023].

⁵⁴ 1.1.24-29, the Countess and Lafeu recall Helen's father, noting 'He was famous [...] in his profession', 'He was excellent indeed. The King very lately spoke admiringly and mourningly'.

rankings above Helen.⁵⁵ What does this mean then for how we read dynamics of status within the play's service relationships? Although Helen and Bertram are clearly not social equals, I suggest they are not so socially distant. Bertram highly values his inherited status and looks down upon Helen's acquired status (be it as one of the 'upper gentry' or as a 'professional middling'). However, in the play, Helen is only posited as 'low' when distinguished from Bertram; she is otherwise valued highly by her social superiors not only for her father's reputation, but also for her status and chastity – the defining features of an elite female servant's worth. I argue that we must think of the play's constant comparison between the two characters' social status as a matter of relativity, and as a comment on the emerging economic system. As a gentlewoman in a Countess's household, Helen very much so holds an elite servant position and utilises it to achieve her own self-interests.

While scholars have celebrated and queried Helen's agency and resistance against patriarchal structures, less critical attention has been paid to her elite servant status and her economic aspirations.⁵⁶ The Countess's initial discussion of Helen having been 'bequeathed' into her household to receive an education following her father's death echoes conduct literature of the period. Robert Brathwaite's *The English Gentlewoman* (1631) describes the ideal gentlewoman as a 'servant' to her mistress; she has been 'bequeathed' into a socially superior household for the purpose of her 'education'.⁵⁷ Bertram, too, speaks of Helen receiving her 'breeding' – that is, her

⁵⁵ If Helen is of 'Professional Middling' status (or her father was), then, according to 'Middling Culture', she would be three full social ranks below Bertram.

⁵⁶ For notable feminist readings of the play, see Carolyn Asp, 'Subjectivity, Desire and Female Friendship in *All's Well That Ends Well*' in *Literature and Psychology* 32, 1986, pp. 48-63; Jean Howard, 'Female Agency in *All's Well That Ends Well*' in *Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Language and Literature* 106, 2006, pp. 43-62; Lynne Simpson, 'The Failure to Mourn in *All's Well That Ends Well*' in *Shakespeare Studies* 22, 1994, pp. 172-188; Susan Snyder, '*All's Well That Ends Well* and Shakespeare's Two Helens: Text and Subtext, Subject and Object' in *English Literary Renaissance* 18:1, 1988, pp. 66-77; Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

⁵⁷ Brathwaite, *The English Gentlewoman* (London, 1631), qq2r.

training and education in manners – at his father’s charge (2.3.114).⁵⁸ What Bertram and his mother describe is a particularly elite form of service. Furthermore, upon leaving for Paris, Bertram instructs Helen to ‘[b]e comfortable to my mother, your mistress, and make much of her’, a clear indication of Helen’s household position (1.1.75-76). It is important to acknowledge that critics have, at times, acknowledged Helen’s servant status: Judith Weil describes her as ‘[t]he servant who quickly becomes the agent of her own wishes’; Mary E. Trull considers her position in relation to ‘her fellow servant Parolles’; Emily C. Gerstell constitutes Helen as ‘one of the many servants who make up the Countess’ household’.⁵⁹ Although these scholars provide effective arguments for Helen’s service position, what is missing from criticism is an understanding of Helen’s social status as a gentlewoman and how she both benefits from and is hindered by her elite servant status. Reading Helen as an elite female servant allows us to better understand the social and therefore economic incentives which motivate her ambitions. Although there is a critical tendency to separate Helen’s service and economic arrangements, I aim to redress the ways in which she resists as well as deliberately engages in and benefits from service, social, and economic hierarchies, in order to cultivate her own social elevation.

In the midst of Helen and Paroles’s sexual banter on the nature of virginity, Helen asks a question which exposes her true intents. It is a question which is central to the play’s narrative: ‘How might one do, sir, to lose it [her virginity] to her own liking?’ (1.1.149-150). Helen desires to be in control: in control of her virginity, who she gives it to, and its overall market value. Her response to Paroles’s insistence that she rids herself of her virginity – ‘Not my virginity yet’ –

⁵⁸ ‘breeding, n. 4’, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press < www.oed.com/view/Entry/23023 > [Accessed 23.03.2022].

⁵⁹ Judith Weil, *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare’s Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 64; Mary E. Trull, *Performing Privacy and Gender in Early Modern Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 94; Gerstell, p. 192.

indicates an unwillingness to follow social expectations (1.1.163). Helen could easily participate in service, economic, and marital exchanges as a passive object, but instead she seeks to actively determine her own value and establish a match of her own making. Matthew Kendrick notes that the playfulness of Helen's response 'is a rejection of crass vendibility, a refusal to cede her position as a desiring subject'.⁶⁰ Helen's choice, to wait until she may 'lose it to her own liking', would delay the action of the exchange. As I discussed in Chapter One, the temporal concept of waiting can function as a form of resistance and empowerment. It is through waiting that Helen resists being a passive object and is empowered to keep hold of her virginity until she acquires the choice to determine who her husband will be. In the transaction of marriage, the woman constitutes the physical gift given to her potential husband, alongside the financial gift of her dowry. However, Helen's ambition to choose, to have some say in the value of her virginity and to whom she gives it, disrupts normative forms of exchange, giving the object of the transaction some authority.

As Paroles urges Helen to benefit from her youth and market value, he couples her body to the commercial product: 'Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying; the longer kept, the less worth. Off with't while 'tis vendible' (1.1.152-4). In urging her to lose it 'while 'tis vendible', Paroles encourages Helen to profit from her youth. A woman is only valued highly while she is young and chaste; as she ages, her value decreases. Paroles employs a quantitative, economic rhetoric to compare the value of an old and young virgin, drawing attention to the temporality of a woman's worth: 'And your virginity, your old virginity, is like one of our French withered pears: it looks ill, it eats drily; marry, tis a withered pear. It was formerly better, marry,

⁶⁰ Matthew Kendrick, 'Being Vendible: Commodification and Agency in *All's Well That Ends Well*' in *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 32:3, 2021, pp. 192-211, p. 193.

but tis a withered pear' (1.1.159-162). Hawkes observes that 'Paroles discusses Helena's virginity in terms that anticipate political economy's theory of trade', articulating the concept that if the body's 'productive value is to be realized, virginity must not be hoarded'.⁶¹ One of virginity's many paradoxical features is that while a woman keeps it, she maintains a pure reputation, but at the same time, that keeping of virginity is also a refusal to reproduce. Sarah Lewis suggests that Helen's temporal agency is central to the play's narrative and that because Helen 'understands time, and the various modes of measurement and reckoning', she is 'therefore able to act through it effectively'.⁶² It is Helen's awareness of both time and of the market value of her virginity that enables her to choose when and to whom she gives her virginity. Much like the male market logic Paroles spouts, Helen locates her value in her virginity and youth. Although Helen appears to resist Paroles's advice, she does follow through with it: she chooses to act and pursue Bertram by way of the King while she is young, and her virginity is most valued.

However, before Helen can attend the King at court, she must negotiate her commodity status within networks of service. When the Countess confronts her, 'Had you not lately an intent – speak truly – / To go to Paris?', Helen acknowledges, 'My lord your son made me to think of this; / Else Paris, and the medicine, and the King / Had from the conversation of my thoughts / Haply been absent then' (1.3.215-6, 229-232). If Helen is to have any chance at all in her pursuit of Bertram, she requires her mistress's permission to leave the household. Because Helen has been 'bequeathed' into the Countess's household, she does not have full ownership over her own body and movements. The *OED* defines 'bequeathed' as 'to make a formal assignation of

⁶¹ Hawkes, p. 149.

⁶² Sarah Lewis, *Time and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 56.

(property of which one is possessed) to anyone’, and, in the case of death, ‘to pass to the recipient after one’s death: to ‘leave’ by will’.⁶³ In the early modern period, according to Robert Cawdry’s definition (1613), it meant ‘to give’.⁶⁴ The term ‘bequeathed’ does not generally refer to the transferring of humans, but rather the passing of property. However, the Countess’s repeated use of it to describe Helen’s position in her household emphasises Helen’s commodity status. Gerstell suggests the Countess uses this description ‘to concretize service ties as commercial relationships’.⁶⁵ By claiming possession of Helen, the Countess links Helen’s service status with her property status. For Helen to then leave and offer her services to the King at court, the Countess must cede ownership of her property. Just as Lavatch, earlier in the same scene, asks the Countess’s permission to leave service and marry, ‘if I may have your ladyship’s good will to go to the world, Isbel the woman and I will do as we may’, Helen requires the Countess to relinquish her from her possession if she is to ‘go to the world’ (1.3.17-9).

As the Countess questions the value of Helen’s services to the King, ‘How shall they credit / A poor unlearned virgin, when the schools / Embowelled of their doctrine, have left off / The danger to itself?’, she employs a quantitative measurement of worth to position her waiting gentlewoman within a network of exchange (1.3.236-9). The Countess queries how Helen’s skill could compare to the King’s educated physicians, in order to scrutinise the value of Helen’s services. The idea of determining value by measuring one thing or person against another was central to the emerging capitalist economy. The Countess’s use of ‘credit’ – the estimate in which the character of a person is held – positions Helen within a network of exchange, in which her unskilled status is valued against that of the educated men.⁶⁶ Credit, according to Craig Muldrew,

⁶³ ‘bequeathed, v. 4b’, *OED Online*, Oxford University < www.oed.com/view/Entry/17847 > [Accessed 21.03.2022].

⁶⁴ Robert Cawdry, *A Table Alphabetical* (London, 1613), B5r.

⁶⁵ Gerstell, p. 194.

⁶⁶ ‘credit, n. 1’, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press < www.oed.com/view/Entry/44113 > [Accessed 21.03.2023].

derives ‘from the Latin *credo*: to believe or trust’.⁶⁷ The economic use of the word is embedded with moral and ethical standards. When the Countess questions how Helen will be credited, she couples the quality of her services with an economic value. Furthermore, by attaching Helen’s sexuality to her identity – she is a ‘poor unlearned virgin’ – the Countess explicitly links her sexuality, status, and education to her worth. It is not enough for Helen to simply attend the King at court as a gentlewoman: she requires her father’s reputation and ‘receipt’ (remedy) if she is to compete with the King’s physicians. Early in the play, Lafew reminds Helen, ‘You must hold the credit of your father’ (1.1.77). It is through her father’s remedy and reputation that Helen not only discovers the potential to pursue her social ambitions, but also appropriates his knowledge to enhance her worth.⁶⁸ When the Countess agrees to send Helen to court – ‘Why, Helen, thou shalt have my leave and love, / Means and attendants’ – she relinquishes control of ownership over Helen (1.3.248-9). As Helen leaves for court, she sheds her household service identity to then offer her services to the King.

When Helen arrives at court, the King, too, questions her purpose: ‘Now, fair one, does your business follow us?’ (2.1.97). Throughout the scene, the King constantly alludes to Helen’s youth and virginity, drawing attention to her femininity – ‘fair one’, ‘maiden’, ‘kind maid’ – while positioning her services within a commercial framework (2.1.97, 112, 143). He links her sexuality to her ‘business’. As Helen advertises her services, she proposes that the King accept her father’s receipt, alongside her own tendering of it: ‘hearing your majesty is touched / With that malignant cause wherein the honour / Of my dear father’s gift stands chief in power, / I

⁶⁷ Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave, 1998), p. 3.

⁶⁸ For scholarship on her father’s receipt and Helen’s use of it, see Chapter One in Mary Floyd-Wilson, *Occult Knowledge, Science and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and Wendy Wall, ‘All’s Well That Ends Well and Recipe Cultures of Knowledge’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

come to tender it' (2.1.108-11). What Helen offers the King is extraordinary in its nature, in that her cure will not only heal his physical body but also keep the monarchy and social order intact. However, her acquisition of her father's knowledge and her subsequent appropriation of his receipt attracts anxieties about the transgressive authority of women's knowledge. The King underscores the threat of her illicit knowledge as he rejects her offer:

I say we must not
So stain our judgement, or corrupt our hope,
To prostitute our past-cure malady
To empirics, or to dissever so
Our great self and our credit, to esteem
A senseless help, when help past sense we deem.
(2.1.117-22)

As the King dismisses Helen, stating that he cannot risk his royal reputation and 'credit' on 'empirics' (quack doctors), he couples her untrained skill with prostitution. By likening her to the prostitute, who sells her body for male pleasure – a 'cure' – the King monetises the exchange, implying that Helen's offer is a debased transaction. His rhetoric and use of 'stain', 'corrupt', and 'prostitute' emphasise Helen's ability to degrade his own royal reputation. Catherine Field suggests that the play discusses 'the cure in terms of illicit sexual activity: healing for a price becomes equivalent to selling one's body in the marketplace'.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Lafew's statement as he introduces Helen to the King – 'I am Cressid's uncle, / That dare leave two together' – further amplifies the illicit nature of the cure (2.1.95-6). By comparing himself to Pandarus (who arranges his niece's sexual encounter), and by characterising Helen as 'Doctor She', Lafew suggests that what Helen comes to offer is sexual. The sexualisation of Helen's cure undermines both the value of her knowledge and her elite social position.

⁶⁹ Catherine Field, "Sweet Practicer, thy Physic I will try": Helena and her "Good Receipt" in *All's Well That Ends Well* in *All's Well That Ends Well: New Critical Editions*, ed. Gary Waller (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 194-208, p. 199.

Despite the King's rejection, Helen is a sophisticated negotiator. She not only surprises him as she challenges his assumption that she would embark on commoditised and debased labour for money, claiming that '[m]y duty then shall pay me for my pains', but she also denounces his suspicion of her as counterfeit:

I am not an imposture that proclaim
Myself against the level of mine aim,
But know I think, and think I know most sure
My art is not past power, nor you past cure.
(2.1.123,153-6)

Helen is determined to prove the authenticity of her product, but to do so, she requires the King to accept her skill without proof of its validity. Kathryn Schwarz notes that, '[m]edical accomplishment, like feminine virtue itself, relies on a close symbiosis of credulity and truth'.⁷⁰ Just as, in early modern thought, a woman cannot prove her virginity until the act of consummation, Helen cannot prove the value of her skill until she performs her cure upon the King. These acts require an acceptance that the product offered is absolute in its nature without substantiation. When the King asks Helen, 'Upon thy certainty and confidence / What dar'st thou venture?', he positions her as an active agent within an economic negotiation (2.1.167-8). Kendrick notes that '[v]enture could mean simply to risk something or to take a chance, but it was coming more and more to signify commercial enterprise. In the context of mercantilism, to venture is to take a risk in the hope of turning a profit'.⁷¹ Much like Jasperino who presumes his pursuit of Diaphanta will allow him to profit (albeit sexually), Helen expects to profit socially from this enterprise. Her response to the King, however, unsettles normative forms of economic exchange:

Tax of impudence

⁷⁰ Kathryn Schwarz, "My Intents Are Fix'd": Constant Will in *All's Well That Ends Well* in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Summer, 2007, Vol. 58, No. 2, pp. 200- 227, p. 214.

⁷¹ Kendrick, p. 196.

A strumpet's boldness, a divulged shame;
Traduced by odious ballads, my maiden's name
Seared otherwise; nay, worse of worst, extended
With vilest torture let my life be ended.

(2.1.168-172)

Helen does not risk money, the typical medium of exchange, but rather offers up her chastity and livelihood – the sum of her worth – as collateral. She is prepared to take on the role of the fallen woman, like those in ‘odious ballads’, and endure public shame. Mary E. Trull suggests ‘[t]he fallen women of ballad literature were often depicted as ambitious social climbers who [...] sought attention and status through liaisons with men of higher status’.⁷² Helen acknowledges, however, that this is not a desired role. As she embraces the threat of obloquy and risks devaluing her market value, she gives credence to her proposition. Kendrick suggests that Helen ‘increases her value in the king’s eyes by drawing his attention to the riskiness of her hazard’.⁷³ As Helen turns her virginity and reputation into her surety, she inflates the value of her worth and services in this exchange.

Helen constructs a complex scenario in which she, as the object of the exchange and as the agent of the transaction, negotiates her own worth as a commodity to achieve a profit. She renders a transaction in which the King would typically determine her value into an exchange where she establishes its parameters:

<i>Helen</i>	Not helping, death's my fee;
	But if I help, what do you promise me?
<i>King</i>	Make thy demand.
<i>Helen</i>	But will you make it even?
<i>King</i>	Ay, by my sceptre and my hopes of heaven.
<i>Helen</i>	Then shalt thou give me with thy kingly hand What husband in thy power I command. Exempted be from me the arrogance To choose from forth the royal blood of France,

⁷² Trull, p. 96.

⁷³ Kendrick, p. 197.

My low and humble name to propagate
With any branch or image of thy state
(2.1.186-196)

As Helen and the King engage in a quid pro quo, their exchange upends social hierarchies of order. Kendrick suggests that Helen ‘asserts control over the market [...] becoming something like a subjective or agentic commodity’, linking her agency ‘to her characterization as a vendible commodity’.⁷⁴ Helen does acquire agency through her status as a vendible commodity as she offers up both her services and her body as collateral; however, I suggest that it is more so her elite social status which enables her to assert control over the market and negotiate this exchange with the King. If we consider what Helen accomplishes in the play, from leaving her service arrangement with the Countess and venturing to court, from negotiating a business exchange with the King to successfully profiting from the exchange, it would be difficult for her to achieve all that she does if she were not a gentlewoman.

Through this exchange, Helen not only acquires an equal negotiating status to that of the King but also control over the recipient of her virginity.⁷⁵ As I have discussed, the market value of chastity is never fixed, and negotiating its price is designed to ensure male authority over female bodies. However, Helen defies male market logic as she refutes her passive position in the patriarchal exchange system to acquire control over her own commodity status and value. The agreement becomes a transaction of property, a commodity-exchange, which relies on an expected profit: Helen performs a service for the King, and he issues her a husband of her choice. Helen’s role as an agent of the transaction challenges the concept of the trafficking in women as she takes control of the narrative of her exchange. Unlike Portia in *The Merchant of*

⁷⁴ Kendrick, p. 196, 201.

⁷⁵ This change in authority is registered in Helen’s speech as she shifts from addressing the King with the formal ‘you’, to ‘thou’, indicating a more personal relationship and more equal status.

Venice, who exemplifies the idea of a woman as a sexual gift and complains that she lacks agency to choose a husband – ‘O me the word “choose”! I may neither choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike, so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father’ (1.2.21-4) – Helen discovers freedom to navigate and participate in exchanges as the desiring object.⁷⁶ Although both Portia and Helen are elite women and orphans, even in death, Portia’s father still maintains his patriarchal authority over her exchange in marriage through his casket test. Jyotsna Singh notes that while Portia ‘is wooed with fervor and devotion, she is nonetheless part of an exchange system that prohibits her occupying the position of an autonomous, desiring subject’.⁷⁷ Helen’s father, on the other hand, bequeathed her to the Countess who, upon giving Helen permission to leave for court, relinquished ownership of her. Furthermore, Helen employs her inheritance – her father’s receipts – to secure her marriage. By navigating networks of service, first in the Countess’s household and then at court, Helen achieves total control over her own commodity status and its exchange.

The success of Helen’s commodity-exchange with the King sparks a network of commerce. As she cures the King of his ailment, Helen turns her choice of husband, Bertram, into the object of exchange. The typical exchange of marriage – the father or household (owner) gives daughter (object) to husband (receiver) – does not play out in *All’s Well*. When the King (owner) gifts Bertram (object) to Helen (receiver), Bertram becomes the object of the exchange. As Helen publicly selects Bertram, she tells him, ‘I dare not say I take you; but I give / Me and my service’ (2.3.102-3). The contradictory nature of Helen’s statement draws attention to her

⁷⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, The Arden Third Series, ed. John Drakakis (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2011).

⁷⁷ Jyotsna G. Singh, “Gendered “Gifts” in Shakespeare’s Belmont: The Economies of Exchange in Early Modern England’ in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, Second Edition, ed. Dympna Callaghan (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishers Limited, 2016), pp. 162-178, p. 169.

desire, which all along has been to ‘take’ and acquire Bertram, but she must frame the exchange in a way that reaffirms the typical process of marriage whereby the man is the served subject and the woman the serving object. By positioning Bertram as the object of the exchange, Helen challenges the patriarchal structures of subservience and the concept of the trafficking in women. When Irigaray asks, ‘why are men not objects of exchange among women?’, she proposes that ‘[i]t is because women’s bodies – through their use, consumption, and circulation – provide for making social life and culture possible’.⁷⁸ However, as Helen demonstrates throughout the play, it is through the use and circulation of Bertram as an object of exchange, that she is able to reproduce and therefore economically and socially profit. Helen’s agreement with the King exposes how the exchange of women is an unfixed equation, one which is in a state of constant flux and one in which women who hold an elite social status have the ability to manipulate their position from objects of exchange into participants in the exchange.

Although Helen chooses who she will be gifted to and with whom her future lies, she is still subjected to male market logic. When Bertram rejects her, he challenges the King:

But follows it, my lord, to bring me down
Must answer for your raising? I know her well:
She had her breeding at my father’s charge.
A poor physician’s daughter my wife? Disdain
Rather corrupt me ever

(2.3.112-116)

Bertram takes issue with Helen’s servant status and her ignoble status. Gerstell explains that ‘Bertram suggests that marriage to Helena is unnatural because she is of his household – as his servant, she is too far beneath him in rank to be his wife, and, moreover, as his servant, she

⁷⁸ Irigaray, p. 171.

functions as an extension of his family'.⁷⁹ Although Bertram views Helen as a household subordinate, through her exchange with the King, she rids herself of her servant status so she may then offer her service to Bertram as his wife.⁸⁰ Throughout this scene, Bertram fixates on their difference in blood. If, as Jean E. Ferrick suggests, blood functioned as the 'locus of a family's virtue and social standing', then Helen's inferior blood would corrupt the preservation of Bertram's superior bloodline.⁸¹ Bertram expresses explicitly aristocratic and feudal attitudes towards the marriage exchange. He believes marrying Helen would cause him to be disparaged by his peers and corrupt the futurity of his lineage. Patricia Crawford notes that '[f]rom kinship groups, blood extended to the social structure: honourable blood distinguished the nobility from the rest of the nation'.⁸² As I will discuss in Chapter Three, white, noble blood is celebrated as a sign of superior status and breeding. Bertram's understanding of blood is that it carries his familial identity: if he is to marry Helen, then she, 'a poor physician's daughter', becomes the vehicle through which his noble lineage continues. Schwarz observes that, within structures of inheritance, '[m]en are fixed by linear transmission; women are mobile regenerators, potential revisionists who might redraw the lines. This disparity places both the threat of patrilineal interruption and the defense against it within the scope of feminine choice, a familiar predicament that illustrates the facts of sexual life'.⁸³ Helen's ability to 'redraw the lines' threatens the preservation and futurity of Bertram's bloodline. Although Helen may be elite,

⁷⁹ Gerstell, p. 194.

⁸⁰ It was commonplace for a wife to be described as a "servant" to her husband in early modern England.

⁸¹ Jean E. Ferrick, *Strangers in Blood: Relocating Race in the Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 14.

⁸² Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 2.

⁸³ Schwarz, p. 121.

young, and a virgin, it is the absence of noble blood and her service position within his mother's household which, in Bertram's eyes, devalues her commodity status.

However, the King's response to Bertram underscores how Helen is valued within a nascent capitalist economy:

Tis only title thou disdain'st in her, the which
I can build up.
[...]
If thou canst like this creature as a maid,
I can create the rest. Virtue and she
Is her own dower; honour and wealth from me.
(2.3.117-144)

The King offers to give Helen a title and money, adding to her market value. As we have seen throughout the play, within an early capitalist market, Helen can negotiate her services to procure status and mobility. Bertram, however, objects to this approach. Helen's cultivation of status is in direct conflict with what Hawkes describes as 'the aristocratic ideology that derives worth from birth, blood and breeding'.⁸⁴ Bertram's views are overtly feudal as he weighs ascribed status above acquired status. The King's ability to alter Helen's social position challenges Bertram's system of value which places innate birth above attributed titles. Furthermore, unlike Bertram, the King locates Helen's inherent value in her chastity. The King disrupts proto-capitalist understandings of inherent value by adding value to Helen's worth. He refashions her identity so the marriage exchange appears as a profit to Bertram. However, the exchange of marriage transforms into an economic prism dictated by perceptions of profit and loss.⁸⁵ Helen profits

⁸⁴ Hawkes, p. 176.

⁸⁵ For a detailed study on loss and productivity in early modern English drama, see Valerie Forman, *Tragicomic Redemptions: Global Economics and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

from the capitalist economy, as she acquires a social title and husband from the King. Bertram, on the other hand, considers this match to be a loss.

Evidently, Helen's power lies in her ability to negotiate exchanges, as she deconstructs normative service, economic, and gendered hierarchies, to win over Bertram. After the wedding ceremony, Bertram immediately deserts her before their marriage can be consummated and legally bound. Bertram writes to Helen, claiming: 'When thou canst get the ring upon my finger, which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband; but in such a "then" I write a "never"' (3.2.56-60). As I discussed in Chapter One, the consummation of marriage made it legally indissoluble. Bertram's early departure leaves Helen in a liminal position, no longer an elite female servant but not yet a wife. Arriving in Florence, Helen engages in a profitable female exchange to regain control of Bertram through the device of the bed trick.

When Helen enlists the Florentine women, she does so from an economic and socially superior position as a count's wife. However, the social status of the Florentine women – the Widow and her daughter Diana – is unknown. The Widow claims to hold an elite social status but to be financially poor, telling Helen: 'Though my estate be fall'n, I was well born' (3.7.4). If this is the case, the Widow and Diana could be read as part of the Established Gentry like Bertram (well born, but potentially without much money).⁸⁶ However, it is far more likely that they are socially positioned as part of the Solid/Accumulative Middling group (one classification down from the 'professional middling'), which 'Middling Culture' describes as:

This group (often in the middle stages of life between youth and older age) have some claim on property, often hold minor public office roles, and are doing well in

⁸⁶ 'Middling Culture' notes 'although some of these families were much poorer than new gentry and upper middling individuals, idealistically they aligned themselves with ancestral values which place them behaviourally within this group'. This could potentially be the case for the Florentine women, but it is not clear.

their profession/s. [...] They have strong networks and social connections with those of both high and low status [...] For women, this can sometimes mean inheriting property, in particular inns or taverns that act as community hubs. This role puts such landladies at the centre of their parishes and suggests an equivalent unofficial “office”.⁸⁷

It appears more likely that the Florentine women are of Accumulative Middling status, as the Widow runs the lodge Helen resides at. If Helen’s newly acquired status marks her as either part of the New Gentry or as one married into the Established Gentry, then she is significantly socially and economically above the women. It is because of her status and economic position as a Count’s wife that she can set the terms of their exchange from a position of power. Helen uses money to entice the women, conflating a sexual and physical exchange of female bodies with an economic exchange. Although the Widow initially expresses doubt, suggesting she would not be ‘acquainted with these businesses’, she does agree to the deceptive device when Helen presents her with a purse of gold and promises to pay Diana’s dowry following the bed trick: ‘Take this purse of gold, / And let me buy your friendly help thus far [...] After, / To marry her, I’ll add three thousand crowns / To what is passed already. (3.7.5, 14-17). Gerstell notes that ‘[m]oney is the key element to the relationship between Helena and the Florentine women’.⁸⁸ Just as the King asserts his elite position to determine the price of Helen’s virginity, Helen employs her elite status to monetise the price of Diana’s chastity. It is the Widow and Diana’s desire to economically profit that encourages their participation in this exchange. However, the success of the bed trick hinges on Helen fulfilling her side of the bargain: not only must she substitute herself for Diana in order to ensure Diana’s chastity remains intact, but she must also follow through with paying Diana’s dowry to ensure the Florentine women’s loyalty.

⁸⁷ ‘Solid/Accumulative Middling’ in ‘Middling Culture’ <<https://middlingculture.com/social-statuses-of-early-modern-england/#Gentry>> [Accessed 17 August, 2023].

⁸⁸ Gerstell, p. 195.

Before the bed trick can take place, the terms and conditions of Diana's supposed exchange with Bertram must be established. Bertram propositions Diana with oaths of love – 'I was compelled to her [Helen], but I love thee / By love's own sweet constraint, and will for ever / Do thee all rights of service' – which she rejects (4.2.15-17). Like Jasperino in *The Changeling*, Bertram frames his sexual need for Diana as an illness: 'Stand no more off, / But give thyself unto my sick desires, / Who then recovers' (4.2.34-6). When women are positioned as the cure for a man's malady, they are expected to give their body for the man's relief and not expect anything in return. The cure appears as a one-sided exchange, a case of "you give, I take". However, like Helen who negotiated a husband in exchange for curing the King, Diana refuses to give without receiving. She first deconstructs Bertram's oaths, drawing attention to the failed economics of his promises: 'Therefore your oaths / Are words and poor conditions, but unsealed / At least in my opinion' (4.2.29-31). Bertram is clearly soliciting her with empty promises; she in turn transforms his oaths into a legal contract. Subha Mukherji argues that '[t]his is not simply a metaphorical way of disputing Bertram's sincerity but a legal argument; an attempt to steer Bertram's private declarations into a contract that can be proved later in a legal event which, as she knows and he does not, has already been planned'.⁸⁹ To ensure the legality of their contract, Diana then demands that Bertram, 'Give me that ring' (4.2.39). Bertram's ring is not just a valuable family heirloom but a signifier of his nobility. He replies, 'I'll lend it thee, my dear, but have no power / To give it from me' (4.2.40-41). Bertram's use of the words 'give' and 'lend' acknowledge the ring's symbolic value and how it is intertwined with the transfer of property ownership.

⁸⁹ Subha Mukherji, "Lawful Deed": Consummation, Custom, and Law in *All's Well That Ends Well* in *Shakespeare Survey*, Vol 49, 1996, pp. 181-200, p. 188.

As the characters negotiate the play's moral and sexual economies, the value of female chastity and of familial blood comes under further scrutiny. Bertram locates his own value in his ring:

It is an honour 'longing to our house,
Bequeathed down from many ancestors,
Which were the greatest obloquy i'th' world
In me to lose.

(4.2.42-45)

By positioning his honour and worth within the ring, Bertram equates the transfer of the ring with the transfer of his familial blood and property. Bertram is notably not focused on the future of his lineage, but on the preservation of its past. His use of 'bequeathed' highlights the passing down or exchange of property, not unlike the Countess's earlier use of it. The ring retains its pure and noble status so long as Bertram keeps hold of it. However, the commodity status and value of the ring, much like women's virginity, is contradictory in its nature: the retention of it safeguards its social value while simultaneously threatening social growth. Bertram's refusal to part with his ring ensures that it maintains its symbolic and noble value; it also ensures that Bertram's lineage remains in a state of stagnation, thus threatening the future value of the ring's commodity status. Diana counters Bertram's argument by positioning her own value within his vocabulary. She rhetorically transforms the ring's value into a metaphor for her chastity:

Mine honour's such a ring.
My chastity's the jewel of our house,
Bequeathed down from many ancestors,
Which were the greatest obloquy i'th' world
In me to lose.

(4.2.45-49)

Diana underscores how the ring reifies the value of her chastity. As she echoes Bertram's words, she illustrates the connection between female chastity and family reputation, recalling the exchange of woman within the exchange of rings. Kendrick notes that 'Bertram's ring thus

possesses relative value in this instance: it enables two distinct things – Bertram’s family honor and Diana’s chastity – to be valued in relation to one another and thereby exchanged’.⁹⁰ When Bertram does agree to give Diana his ring – ‘Here, take my ring. / My house, mine honour, yea, my life be thine’ (4.2.51-2) – he agrees to give her what defines his value, if she gives him hers: the ring is exchanged for (what he presumes to be) her chastity.⁹¹ Helen has structured the exchange of rings, knowing full well of Bertram’s weakness: ‘This ring he holds / In most rich choice; yet, in his idle fire, / To buy his will it would not seem too dear’ (3.7.25-7). For as much as Bertram claims to value his family ring, Helen perceives how readily he would exchange it to profit. As Helen orchestrates this exchange, she positions Diana’s chastity as the object of exchange.⁹²

The bed trick hinges on the physical exchange of rings and female bodies. Diana instructs Bertram to remain ‘but an hour’ after he has ‘conquered my yet-maiden bed’, and not to speak to her, in which time a second ring will be placed on his finger, which serves to identify which woman is in Bertram’s bed (4.2.57-8). Devin Byker notes that ‘[t]hese conditions of speechlessness and sightlessness dissolve the stability of concrete identities’.⁹³ By eliminating the male gaze, the women remove Bertram’s agency, denying him the ability to choose which woman he sleeps with. David McCandless observes that Diana’s directions, which likely come

⁹⁰ Kendrick, p. 201.

⁹¹ This line echoes Portia’s in *The Merchant of Venice* when she tells Bassanio, ‘This house, these servants and this same myself / Are yours, my lord’s. I give them with this ring’ (3.2.170-1).

⁹² Diana’s role in this exchange is complicated and has been thoroughly analysed by scholars. Scholars have suggested she functions ‘as an object trafficked to cement alliances’ (Gerstell, p. 203) or that she is reduced ‘to an exploitable object’ (Kendrick, p. 206). Carol Thomas Neely views Diana’s objectification as a form of prostitution; Maurice Charney reads the exchange as a bribe; Susan Snyder interprets it as a form of female friendship and solidarity. See Carol Thomas Neely, *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare’s Plays* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare on Love and Lust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Susan Snyder, ‘*All’s Well That Ends Well* and Shakespeare’s Two Helens: Text and Subtext, Subject and Object’ in *English Literary Renaissance*, Vol.18, 1988, pp. 66-77.

⁹³ Devin Byker, ‘Bed Tricks and Fantasies of Facelessness: *All’s Well* and *Macbeth* in the dark’ in *Face-to-Face in Shakespearean Drama: Ethics, Performance, Philosophy*, eds. Matthew James Smith and Julia Reinhard Lupton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 132-159, p. 138.

from Helen, and the ‘restrictions she imposes – darkness and silence – deprive [Bertram] of the two patriarchal capacities that define him as (masculine) subject: the gaze and speech’.⁹⁴ In this way, the bed trick challenges nascent, capitalist assessments of worth as Bertram is unable to compare the women; it also undermines the trafficking in women and patriarchal structures of subservience as it is the women who gain control over the male body. Throughout the play, Helen acquires authority over male bodies by way of various economic exchanges. She first performs a service for the King as she cures him, which requires him to submit to her touch and bodily control while she applies the remedy to his body. Her physical possession of the King’s body results in her profit as she acquires her choice of a husband. Field suggests that the healing of the King mirrors the ‘bed-trick-as-cure’: ‘[b]oth actions allow Helena access to Bertram’s and the King’s bodily interiors’.⁹⁵ In the bed trick, Bertram (unknowingly) submits himself to Helen’s authority. Her possession of Bertram’s body and of Diana’s leads her to profit as she legally ratifies her marriage. Helen’s use of the bed trick as a form of sexual and economic exchange demonstrates how women benefit from manipulating capitalist measurements of value.

The play’s final scene is an unravelling of deception that hinges on the physical proof of the exchange of women and the exchange of rings. As it is discovered that Bertram has miraculously acquired Helen’s ring (she is presumed to be dead), the King claims that he gave her the ring and ‘[t]hat she would never put it from her finger / Unless she gave it to yourself in bed [...] or sent it us / Upon her great disaster’ (5.3.109-112). The King conflates the physical exchange of the ring with the exchange of Helen’s virginity, locating social, sexual, and economic value in the object. Although the ring functions as inalienable proof that Helen and

⁹⁴ David McCandless, ‘Helena’s Bed-Trick: Gender and Performance in *All’s Well That Ends Well*’ in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Winter, 1994), pp. 449-468, p. 463.

⁹⁵ Field, p. 203.

Bertram's marriage has been consummated, Bertram denies the exchange took place, '[i]f you shall prove / This ring was ever hers, you shall as easy / Prove that I husbanded her bed in Florence', drawing attention to the need for proof of authenticity in virginity and in the circulation of objects (5.3.124-6). As the circulation of the ring binds the woman's chastity to the man who acquires the object, it simultaneously solidifies the physical exchange of women. The ring not only confirms Helen's loss of virginity but also serves as proof that she has legitimately transitioned from a servant within Bertram's natal household to be his wife. With this circularity, symbolised by the ring, Helen will acquire her own serving women now, as mistress of the household.

Furthermore, when Diana enters with her petition – that Bertram has promised himself to her and has taken her virginity – she presents his family ring as proof of their bond. Bailey suggests that '[t]he very language of the bond invoked the physical act of bondage'.⁹⁶ The ring physically and sexually binds Bertram to Diana, and, as Kendrick notes, it occupies 'a privileged place in its capacity as an object of exchange and locus of transcendent meaning and truth'.⁹⁷ Although Bertram denies he is bound to her, and rather claims that he purchased her sexual labour with the ring, '[s]he got the ring, / And I had that which any inferior might / At market price have bought', the ring functions as proof of her authenticity and proof of the exchange of women (5.3.217-9). Diana, unfortunately, has no credibility against Bertram's assertion that she is 'a common gamester' (5.3.187). She is a reminder of how structures of subservience within the play position lower status women as subordinates. As one who could be classified as having 'Accumulative Middling' status, Diana is socially and economically well below Bertram and he employs his noble status to discredit her statements. Bertram tells the King:

⁹⁶ Bailey, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Kendrick, p. 207.

My lord, this is a fond and desperate creature,
Whom sometime I have laughed with. Let your highness
Lay a more noble thought upon mine honour
Than for to think that I would sink it here
(5.3.178-181)

Bertram degrades the truth of Diana's claims by disregarding her as a 'desperate creature' and 'a gamester'. He implores the King to value his statements more highly, than to assume he would 'sink' to marry someone so far below him. Dynamics of gender and status are at play as Bertram's elite position allows him to debase Diana's accusations. It is only when, after the King presses Diana for information on the ring and she refuses to speak, that he threatens her with jail and death, and like Bertram, labels her a 'common customer' (5.3.284). Diana's reputation is nearly depleted, and it is at this point which she states, 'I'll put in bail, my liege' (5.3.283). This 'bail' Diana speaks of is Helen; Helen is Diana's surety and she strategically positions herself as such within the economic framework of her trick to not only ensure that Diana's reputation remains chaste but also to guarantee her physical bondage to Bertram. Helen's body becomes the economic bond through which Diana can be freed and the physical bond through which Bertram is bound.

The play's conclusion demonstrates how elite female servants can profit from an early capitalist economy through networks of exchange. The bed trick is ultimately successful because Helen follows through with her part of the bargain: payment. This allows both Helen and the Florentine women to prosper: Diana receives a dowry and is given her choice of husband by the King; the Widow is ensured that her family lineage will continue and their status elevated; Helen secures control over her husband and becomes the vehicle through which his noble lineage will grow. She achieves what she first set out to do – to lose her virginity to her own liking. By manipulating economic exchanges and by negotiating the value of her commodity status from

her position as an elite female servant, Helen achieves social elevation. The play celebrates how she undermines Bertram's feudal attitudes to profit from a nascent capitalist economy.

Whereas *The Changeling* offers a more unsympathetic view of how elite female servants navigate and profit from networks of exchange, *All's Well That Ends Well* shows how women are empowered by a nascent capitalist society. Social status plays a large role in how elite female servants are either limited or liberated by structures of subservience, both within the early modern household and the nascent capitalist economy. As Helen leaves her service position within the Countess's household and ventures to court, she acquires status by participating in economic exchanges and by manipulating her commodity status. The bed trick ultimately succeeds because both Helen and the Florentine women accomplish their side of the bargain. In contrast, neither Diaphanta nor Beatrice Joanna can successfully profit from the bed trick exchange because the agreed upon terms and conditions are not upheld.

If we return to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, which consider the value of elite female servants and how they manipulate their commodity status, it becomes clear that understanding how a capitalist economy measures value and the ways in which chastity is valued allows for a woman to then negotiate and manipulate her status within exchanges. Both plays posit sexual exchanges within economic and service discourses, drawing attention to the commodity status of elite female servants and the value of their chastity. However, it is through economic exchanges like the bed trick trope that women can both prosper from and critique systems of value. The bed trick parodies capitalist measurements of value by conflating two women and by removing the male ability to compare one woman's worth against the other.

Although the bed trick is a form of sexual exchange and constitutes the trafficking in women, it enables women to choose how they will be exchanged, at what price, and to whom. It is through the bed trick that women can achieve economic independence and control over their own bodies. I have so far examined two ways in which elite female servants can claim agency: through time and through modes of exchange. In the following chapter, I turn my attention to explore how the construction of race complicates the identity and valuing of elite Black female servant characters. Positioning Black female servants within a wider economy of elite female service, as I will show, and recognising their elite status, introduces new ways of thinking about how race, sexuality, gender, and service intersect in early modern drama.

Chapter Three: Conceptualising the elite Black female servant in Early Modern English Drama: Race, Gender, and Status in Service

The central focus of this chapter is the intersectionality of race, gender, and status as represented in the figure of the elite Black female servant in early modern English drama.¹ Drawing on what Kim F. Hall, in her foundational book, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, describes as an ‘emerging tradition of black maids’ appearing in drama at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and Imtiaz Habib’s detailed archival and dramatic analysis of the ‘blackamoor maidservant’, I aim to resituate this figure within what I have been delineating as a wider economy of service.² I suggest that Black female servants (those whom scholars have previously called ‘Moorish maidservants’ or ‘blackamoor maids’) more often than not hold an elite household position in early modern drama; this elite status has been ignored because of blackness’s association with deviance and foreignness and because scholars have failed to read Black characters as elite.³ I wish to depart from the past critical line of thought, which has reductively read elite Black female servants as lowly and driven by lust, in an attempt to achieve a broader understanding of the tensions between gender, race and service in early modern drama.

Black female servants in early modern drama perform a kind of elite service identical to that of their white counterparts: they write letters, carry the household keys, and are required to

¹ See the Introduction for an explanation of why I call these characters ‘Black female servants’. In this thesis, I only capitalize “Black” when discussing a specific cultural group, not when analyzing “black” or “blackness” as a colour or a rhetorical description. I also, notably, use ‘white’ in the lower case to refer to skin colour.

² Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 188; Imtiaz Habib, “‘Hel’s perfect character’; or The Blackamoor Maid in Early modern English drama: The postcolonial cultural history of a dramatic type”, *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 11.3 (2000), pp. 277–304, p. 279 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10436920008580270>>.

³ For a foundational reading of black servant characters in early modern drama, see Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

physically and emotionally serve their mistress; they, too, seek social advancement, expecting marriage as a reward for their service.⁴ However, it is the ways in which their race is constructed which complicates their position and identity within the early modern household. ‘Race’ as Ayanna Thompson notes, is not ‘a stable category that refers solely to skin color, somatic aspects, or phenotypes’: it is a social construct which endorses exclusion.⁵ At the core of this thesis is an emphasis on reading status alongside social formations of identity (such as gender, sexuality, and race) in early modern theatrical representations of female service and within the early modern English household. In this chapter, I investigate how status influences and informs the elite Black female servant’s actions, and how in thinking about the positionality of these women – that is, where they stand in relation to dynamics of privilege and power – we can achieve a more nuanced understanding of their portrayal in early modern drama. Looking at the representation of elite Black female servants in John Webster’s *The White Devil* (1612), John Fletcher’s *The Knight of Malta* (1618), and William Percy’s largely forgotten manuscript, *A Forrest Tragedye in Vacunium* (1602?) exposes the ways in which this figure is paradoxically and metaphorically conceived as both a servant and a slave, as an agent of disruption and a

⁴ In the Introduction, I explain my methodology for determining a servant’s status when it is not detailed in the text: I examine the status of the household in which she serves and whether the servant’s actions are indicative of elite or domestic female service.

⁵ Ayanna Thompson, ‘Did the Concept of Race Exist for Shakespeare and His Contemporaries?’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 1-16, p. 7. For a broader understanding of race, see Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Heng argues that race ‘is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences’ (p. 19). Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields’s definition of race as ‘the conception or the doctrine that nature produced humankind in distinct groups, each defined by inborn traits that its members share and that differentiate them from members of other distinct groups of the same kind but of unequal rank’ shows that race and race-making are flexible constructs and therefore can be mobilised to create hierarchies of inequality (Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2014), p. 16). Thompson suggests that race-making is ‘the underlying imaginative horizon, belief system, or individual and collective mental landscape that seeks to divide humans along unequal lines’ (p. 8). Racism, as Fields and Fields argue, ‘is first and foremost a social practice, which means that it is an action or a rationale for action, or both’ (p. 17). In early modern drama, playwrights employ both race-making and racism to structure hierarchies of inequality.

facilitator of resolution, and as a household insider and a cultural outsider.⁶ I argue that this paradoxical dualism in the figure of the elite Black female servant amplifies dynamics of exclusion within the household. In this chapter, I examine the intersection of race, gender, and status to scrutinise how the figure of the elite Black female servant challenges hierarchies of hegemony and how the institution of service intensifies the spectacle of race in the early modern household.

This chapter is influenced by two recent and prominent monographs which question the intersections of race, kinship, and servitude in the early modern period: Patricia Akhimie's *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference: Race and Conduct in the Early Modern World* (2018), and Urvashi Chakravarty's *Fictions of Consent: Slavery, Servitude and Free Service in Early Modern England* (2022). Akhimie's study reveals the interplay between the struggle for social advancement and racial discrimination in the early modern period. She suggests that it is at such moments when characters 'should be most capable of capitalizing on the possibilities for advancement in conduct culture' in which plays 'stage a brutal process of denial of access to such mobility, revealing incidentally the process by which those limiting bodily markers are made while also attributing the inability of marked people to rise from their natural insufficiencies'.⁷ It is the intertwining of status and race which she argues 'posit[s] the relative capacity of groups for social mobility or immobility'.⁸ Akhimie's work on early modern

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the plays will be taken from these editions: John Webster, *The White Devil*, The Arden Third Series, ed. Benedict S. Robinson (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2019); John Fletcher, *The Knight of Malta*, ed. George Walton Williams, in *The Beaumont and Fletcher Canon Vol. VIII*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); William Percy, 'A Forrest Tragedye in Vacunium', Alnwick, The Archives of the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle, DNP: MS 509, 97r-124v. If interested, the microfilm (324) of 'A Forrest Tragedye' can be viewed at the British Library after receiving permission from the Duke of Northumberland Archives. I am indebted to Christopher Hunwick and Andrew Jack of the Alnwick Castle Archives for all their assistance.

⁷ Patricia Akhimie, *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), p. 28.

⁸ Akhimie, p. 8.

domestic manuals demonstrates how the family is depicted as ‘a discrete unit with a clear hierarchy in which servants are both part of and apart from the family’.⁹ The early modern ‘family’ describes those who occupy an intimate spatial relationship as well as those who are consanguineous. Akhimie’s scholarship is immensely important in outlining models and networks of kinship, which, as I will later detail, work to enforce hierarchies of unity and difference within the early modern household. The construction of identity within the household is affected by such hierarchies of social, racial, and cultural differences which nevertheless exist to purposefully designate insiders from outsiders, kin from strangers.

Chakravarty’s monograph, like Akhimie’s, focuses on the shifting definition of the family in the early modern period while also considering the place of metaphoric slavery at the heart of English institutions. Examining the co-articulation of service and slavery, and the ways in which these categories of labour are legally distinct yet markedly similar, Chakravarty investigates how early modern drama stages the household and models of kinship to justify structures of servitude, bondage, and slavery. I draw upon Chakravarty’s scholarship to suggest that the unfixed position of the elite Black female servant within the early modern household speaks to slippages between figurations of service and slavery, for at times she presents as an elite female servant, performing a sort of intimate service for her mistress, and at other points appears to be neither entirely a slave nor a servant, objectified and commodified by the household in which she serves. As Chakravarty explores how understandings of the household shifted from ‘a community based on service to one also predicated on consanguinity’, she suggests that the servant is paradoxically constructed as both foreign and familiar, part of the household and yet not a blood relative.¹⁰ She

⁹ Akhimie, p. 91.

¹⁰ Urvashi Chakravarty, *Fictions of Consent: Slavery, Servitude and Free Service in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), p. 11.

contends that the servant – the ‘outsider within’ – challenges conceptions of ‘what it meant to be “English” and to be “barbarous,” to be bound and to be “at libertie”’.¹¹ In my analysis of the figure of the elite Black female servant, I integrate Akhimie’s and Chakravarty’s scholarship to suggest this figure stokes fears of female action and advancement, as well as anxieties of the stranger within: in early modern drama, the elite Black female servant is purposed as one who could ultimately unravel and pose a direct threat to a household’s reputation and future. More specifically, I propose that recognising her elite status is crucial if we are to understand how social constructs of race affect service relationships within the household in early modern drama.

This chapter’s attention to the nuances of social status within service roles, and the various ways in which a servant’s status intersects with discourses of race and gender as they are presented on the early modern stage, is unique in that it recognises the elite role played by the Black female servant within the household.¹² Before looking closely at the figure of the elite Black female servant in three plays, I wish to draw attention to the ways in which studies of service in early modern drama and studies of critical race theory and of whiteness were, for the most part, separate until very recently. As the study of service evolved in the early 2000’s, literary scholars had a tendency to focus on the role of servants in Shakespeare’s oeuvre:

¹¹ Chakravarty, p. 11.

¹² Both Anthony Barthelemy (1987) and Imtiaz Habib (2000) write comprehensive studies of Black female servant characters appearing across early modern drama. See Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race* (1987) and Imtiaz Habib, “‘Hel’s perfect character’” (2000). Recent critical race and feminist scholarship has built on Barthelemy’s and Habib’s important work to consider the intersection of race, gender, religion, nationality, and sexuality in Black female servant characters. To name a few, see Ambereen Dadabhoy, ‘The Other Woman: The Geography of Exclusion in the Knight of Malta (1618)’ in *Remapping Travel Narratives, 1000-1700: To the East and Back Again*, ed. Monsterrat Piera (Arc Humanities Press, 2018), pp. 235-256; Kirsten N. Mendoza, “‘Thou maiest inforce my body but not mee’”: Racializing Consent in John Marston’s *The Wonder of Women*’ in *Renaissance Drama*, Vol. 49, n. 1 (Chicago: Northwestern University, 2021), pp. 29-55; Iman Sheeha, “[A] Maid Called Barbary’: *Othello*, Moorish Maidservants and the Black Presence in Early Modern England’ in *Shakespeare Survey 75 Othello*, ed. Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 89-102; Sheeha’s “‘Her Ladyship’s Foolish’”: The servant’s disobedience in John Webster’s *The White Devil*’ in *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 31:3, (2018), pp. 182-190. My work differs in that I analyse the place of status and its effect on the figure of the Black female servant in early modern drama.

although Shakespeare writes of racialised minority servants, rarely did he make visible these characters. These scholars were therefore limited in what they could analyse in regard to the racialization of blackness and service in Shakespeare's plays. However, in the early 2000's, scholars of service do, respectively, bring questions of slavery or race into their monographs. Michael Neill's *Putting History to the Question* (2000) is particularly influential to the unification of race and service studies. In his section on 'Race, Nation, Empire', he delves into a range of texts including (but not limited to) Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Merchant of Venice*, Fletcher's *The Island Princess*, Spencer's *The Faerie Queene*, and a variety of travel writing pieces from the early modern period to scrutinise service and how social differences influence formations of identity. Subsequent studies, such as Judith Weil's *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare's Plays* (2005), David Evett's *Discourses of Service in Shakespeare's England* (2005), and David Schalkwyk's *Shakespeare, Love and Service* (2008), also touch on concepts of slavery and race. For example, Weil draws from Orlando Patterson's study of slavery which argues that the danger of defining "invariant dynamics" in social systems is the neglect of "limiting" or "borderline" cases which "challenge the conceptual stability of the processes one has identified", to consider how many of Shakespeare's characters (not necessarily servant characters) can be treated as borderline cases.¹³ Her primary attention to slavery – but more so to ideas of freedom – come in her analysis of *Othello* and *Macbeth*. In Chapter Five of her monograph, Weil reads Iago as Othello's enslaver, and considers how characters within the play navigate relationships of dominance, and in Chapter Six, she explores how 'Macbeth evokes freedom through representations of bondage'.¹⁴ Evett's monograph also considers slavery but

¹³ Judith Weil, *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 6.

¹⁴ Weil, p. 131.

from a classical and religious perspective, drawing from Greek and Roman depictions of slavery. He addresses how these classical depictions of slavery are present in *The Comedy of Errors*, in *Titus Andronicus*, and in *The Tempest*, notably in the characters of Dromio, Aaron, and Caliban. However, Evett does not probe the relationship between race and slavery in these plays.

On the other hand, Schalkwyk's *Shakespeare, Love, and Service*, looks to race rather than slavery to interrogate relationships of affection and exploitation within the household. Schalkwyk addresses his own personal experience as a young white South African during the height of apartheid. He describes how, growing up in a 'neo-colonialist setting', his family had three or four Black South African domestic servants in their household.¹⁵ Schalkwyk draws from his own childhood to interrogate dynamics of dependence and exploitation within household service relationships. He describes the ways in which white South Africans would have considered their domestic servants to 'be part of the family' and yet, 'none of their servants saw themselves in this way'.¹⁶ Although Schalkwyk does not include any records of Black South African voices in the apartheid regime, he does refer to empirical research for accounts of the relationship between employers and their domestic servants. Schalkwyk makes clear that dependence and affection were felt solely by the white masters and mistresses; this 'sentimental obfuscation', he notes, would have been utilised by white masters and mistresses to obscure 'real relations of exploitation'.¹⁷ Acknowledging the complexities of affection within a neo-colonialist household allows for Schalkwyk to then consider the 'deeply affective aspects' of master-servant relationships in early modern England, 'however fraught with problems they may be'.¹⁸ Later in

¹⁵ David Schalkwyk, *Shakespeare, Love and Service* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 18.

¹⁶ Schalkwyk, p. 18.

¹⁷ Schalkwyk, p. 18.

¹⁸ Schalkwyk, p. 19.

his monograph, Schalkwyk, like Evett, looks to *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Tempest*, to scrutinise how bondage destabilises identities within master-servant relationships.

It is notably scholars of colour in feminist and postcolonial studies such as Ania Loomba, Kim F. Hall, and Imtiaz Habib, who have brought racialised Black servant characters into a wider critical conversation as they considered the works of Shakespeare's contemporaries.¹⁹ The field of service studies has also broadened its scope in the past few years, turning away from Shakespeare's texts to offer a more comprehensive examination of service in early modern literature.²⁰ Furthermore, it is only recently that historians and scholars have looked to the archives for records of black voices, notably black servant voices. Habib's influential archival work connects the mounting numbers of encumbered Black lives and their geographical locations within London to the emergence of racial slavery and empire in the early modern period. In doing so, he uncovers reference to the 'varied impress of black working lives' and confirms that 'domestic service is what Africans brought into England initially or permanently often ended up in'.²¹ References to Black servant experiences within the archives help us to understand structures of household and social relations within the early modern period. The work scholars have completed and the work they are continuing to embark on refigures the way we think about Black lives and communities in the early modern social world, and within early modern English drama.

¹⁹ This important scholarship includes (but is not limited to) Ania Loomba, 'The Color of Patriarchy: Critical difference, cultural difference, and Renaissance drama' in *Women, "Race", and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, (eds.) Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 17-34 (also see Boose's chapter in this collection for work on race and service); Hall's *Things of Darkness* (1995); Bindu Malieckal's "'Hel's Perfect Character": The Black Woman as the Islamic Other in Fletcher's *The Knight of Malta*' in *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 28, (Oct 01, 1999), pp. 53- 68; Habib's *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677: imprints of the invisible* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008).

²⁰ See Akhimie's *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference* (2018), Chakravarty's *Fictions of Consent* (2022), and Iman Sheeha's *Household Servants in Early Modern Domestic Tragedy* (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2020).

²¹ Habib, *Black Lives*, p. 3, 49.

In this chapter, I engage with post-colonial, critical race, feminist, and service scholarship to analyse a range of early modern plays; at the same time, I seek to continue the expansion of the field of service studies by engaging with archival records of Black servant experiences and by attending to plays by Webster, Fletcher, and Percy that have hitherto not been read in such a context. My attention to Percy's manuscript *A Forrest Tragedye in Vacunium* and particularly to the character Rhodaghond, an elite Black female servant, intends to broaden the canon of plays which engage with early modern race-making. Percy's play has received little critical attention apart from Harold Hillebrand's (1938) and Madeline Hope Dodds's (1945) articles on the nature of the various manuscripts and staging devices.²² I propose that the play's value lies in how it depicts broader issues of gender and race, and the dynamics of power in both service relationships and within the early modern household.²³ In this chapter, I examine the elite Black female servant's household position alongside discourses of colour and anxieties of kinship to investigate how gender, race, status, and service converge in the early modern household to complicate the figure and identity of the Black female servant. In section one, 'Service and Slavery in the Early Modern Household', I analyse how metaphorical slippages between service and slavery change the way we read elite Black female servants. I focus on the characters of Zanthia in *The Knight of Malta* and Rhodaghond in *A Forrest Tragedye in Vacunium* to consider

²² See Madeline Hope Dodds, 'A Forrest Tragedye in Vacunium' in *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Oct., 1945), pp. 246-258; Harold N. Hillebrand, 'William Percy: An Elizabethan Amateur' in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Jul., 1938), pp. 391-416.

²³ Although Percy's play was never performed, he purposefully wrote it for the stage. In his 'Notes' he writes: 'Thus for Poules A Countrye Tragedy in vacunium. For Actors A Forrest Tragedy in Vacunium by reason of their severall two Chorus. The one but Private the other most Magnificent' (97r). Percy appears to have written this manuscript with the intention of either Paul's boys or a professional company performing his play. Caroline E. Jameson's unpublished MA thesis on this play observes: 'A Forrest Tragedye in its original state, for adult or amateur actors, required a cast of twenty-eight (not counting unspecified attendants), [...] For Paul's, Percy cuts the Chorus from eight to two, thus requiring twenty actors, which was within Paul's limit' (lxi). Furthermore, Percy's specific stage instructions – for example, that 'Cupid's Grove' is to be placed over the 'middle door' – indicates a strong awareness of Paul's stage property. See William Percy, 'A Forrest Tragedye in Vacunium', ed. Caroline E. Jameson, unpublished MA, (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1972).

how these two separate institutions of labour are portrayed in early modern drama, and how the construction of race complicates our understanding of the positionality of these characters as elite female servants. Section two, 'Discourses of Colour', analyses how the language of these three plays places colour at the nexus of identity to justify subaltern hierarchies within the household. I contend that these racialised discourses are intensified by elite female service relationships. In early modern visual and literary culture, the black/white binary is commonly used to juxtapose a white mistress and her black servant so that blackness literally frames whiteness. However, in these texts, I suggest discourses of colour sometimes conflate the white mistress and her elite Black female servant: the women are more similar than different, a result, I argue, of the servant's elite status. In this chapter's final section, 'Anxieties of Kinship', I focus primarily on Webster's *The White Devil* to analyse how visible interracial relationships provoke anxieties of household order, familial lineage, and racial purity. I propose that the status of the elite Black female servant mobilises concerns of race and sexual reproduction within the early modern household. In Chapter One, I examined how the institution of service sought to control women's bodies during this period between childhood and marriage, and how elite female servants discover agency within the liminalities of service. In Chapter Two, I considered the ways in which female bodies and chastity were valued and circulated as objects of economic exchange and how elite female servants manipulate modes of exchange to achieve their social desires. In this chapter, I explore how the female body is viewed as a corruptible site, vulnerable to transgressions, and the ways in which the Black female body of the elite servant is situated within a nexus of anxieties. I ultimately argue that service aggravates dynamics of alterity in the early modern household as playwrights couple anxieties about blackness to anxieties about the social status of the elite female servant.

Service and Slavery in the Early Modern Household

Although the early modern household may appear to negotiate binaries which distinguish insiders from outsiders, kin from strangers, the elite Black female servant reveals the complexities and inconsistencies of what it meant to be part of the early modern family. Ania Loomba suggests that ‘the dwindling of this concept of the household by the sixteenth century can be related to changes in class, gender and race relations, each of which called for a stricter definition of the family in order to preserve property and cultural identity’.²⁴ Our understanding of the early modern household and how it is defined by ‘family’ or ‘kinship’ relationships is not only complicated by status, gender and race relations, but also by the presence of servants. One of the first meanings of ‘family’ was ‘the servants of a particular household or establishment’.²⁵ In Aristotle’s *Politics*, he presents an analogy – one heavily referenced throughout the early modern period – for reading the family as a microcosm of the state.²⁶ Aristotle argues that the foundations of the family unit (as well as those of a functioning society) are produced by natural hierarchical pairings, such as husband and wife, parent and child, and master and slave, which work to distinguish superiors from subordinates.²⁷ Early modern writers drew from Aristotle’s work to distinguish household hierarchies and to justify coverture and property law. Aristotle writes that ‘[p]roperty is a part of the household, and the art of acquiring property is a part of the

²⁴ Ania Loomba, ‘The Color of Patriarchy: Critical difference, cultural difference, and Renaissance drama’ in *Women, “Race”, and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, (eds.) Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.17-34, p. 31.

²⁵ ‘family, n. 1’, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (2022) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/67975> [Accessed 29 Nov. 2022]. See also Chakravarty, p. 86.

²⁶ As I discuss in the Introduction and will continue to explore in Chapter Four, in Gouge’s *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), he lays out these hierarchies which ideally paved the way, on a macro level, for a successful society, and on a micro level, an order household.

²⁷ In Hannah Crawford and Sarah Lewis’s introduction to *Family Politics in Early Modern Literature*, they suggest that ‘Aristotle makes clear, these are differences in degree rather than kind’ (p. 5). They also draw attention to how Aristotle’s use of the family and state metaphor ‘is in fact fraught with contradiction’ as it seeks to highlight degrees of sameness and difference in both biological and social relationships (p. 5). Hannah Crawford and Sarah Lewis (eds.), *Family Politics in Early Modern Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

art of managing the household [...] And so, in the arrangement of the family, a slave is a living possession'.²⁸ As I discussed in Chapter Two, it was unclear who held absolute ownership over a servant's body in the early modern period – the servant or the master. On the other hand, it was explicit that masters held complete control over their slaves because of their property status. David Hawkes explains how the slave 'is rather a 'possession' and a 'property' of his master, and so his identity is subsumed within his master's'.²⁹ Slavery, as Orlando Patterson has long since noted, 'is one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the view of the master, and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave'.³⁰ Chakravarty observes that 'in Renaissance England, slavery was seen not as an extreme form of service, but rather as opposed to it. To be a slave was categorically *not* to be a servant; slavery was marginal and threatening'.³¹ Whereas a servant maintained some degree of ownership over their body and legal status while in service, the slave was intertwined with their master and deprived of their own legal identity.

What does this suggest, then, for how we read the positionality of the elite Black female servant in early modern English drama? Was she conceptualised as a slave because of her racial identity, despite her status as an elite servant? In Chakravarty's monograph, she makes it clear that slavery and service exist as 'mutually distinct categories'.³² William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) describes slaves or 'servile' servants as those who were 'borne servants, or sold for servants, or taken in war, or ransomed'.³³ He does not identify slaves by their nationality or skin

²⁸ Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Colonial Press, 1990), see pp. 4-9.

²⁹ David Hawkes, *Shakespeare and Economic Theory* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), p. 162.

³⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comprehensive Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 1.

³¹ Chakravarty, p. 66.

³² Chakravarty, p. 9.

³³ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), L9v.

colour, but rather suggests that it is their vendibility that determines their slave status. In Fletcher's *The Knight of Malta*, he features Zanthia, a Black female servant, alongside Lucinda, a fair 'Turkish captive' who Miranda (the Knight of Malta) claims as his 'prize' (3.2.61, 78).³⁴ Captured in a sea raid, Lucinda becomes Miranda's 'slave' (3.3.81). As a captive of war, Lucinda is directly taken by the victors and turned into property. Ambereen Dadabhoy suggests that '[a]s booty Lucinda is nothing more than a warm, sexually available body'.³⁵ When Gomera lists the property taken in the war raid, he includes Lucinda, a 'Turkish Captive of incomparable beauty' amongst 'cloth[s] of Tissew [...] of purple Velvet' (3.2.65,78). Situated amongst the chattel, Gomera describes Lucinda as a 'prize' he missed out on possessing. Slaves were positioned within an institution of bondage in which their enslavers asserted complete control over their bodies and vendibility.

On the other hand, 'liberal' service was understood to be a form of consensual and willing labour, in which servants participated in a 'voluntary contract'.³⁶ Elite female servants are categorised as 'liberal' servants because, unlike slaves who were permanently bound to and possessed by their household, these women were only temporarily contracted to the household and maintained a degree of legal autonomy. However, as Chakravarty notes, liberal service is a paradox in which one is believed to be 'free' yet is nevertheless contractually bound to a master

³⁴ There is very little existing scholarship on Fletcher's *The Knight of Malta*. For a few notable readings, see Sandra Clark, *The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher: Sexual Themes and Dramatic Representation* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994); Bindu Malieckal, "'Hel's Perfect Character": The Black Woman as the Islamic Other in Fletcher's *The Knight of Malta*' in *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 28, (Oct 01, 1999), pp. 53- 68; Virginia Mason Vaughan, 'The Maltese Factor: The Poetics of Place in *The Jew of Malta* and *The Knight of Malta*' in *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion*, ed. Jyotsna G. Singh (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 340-354; Jane Hwang Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Ambereen Dadabhoy, 'The Other Woman: The Geography of Exclusion in *The Knight of Malta* (1618)' in *Remapping Travel Narratives, 1000-1700: to the East and back again*, ed. Montserrat Piera (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2018), pp. 235-256.

³⁵ Dadabhoy, p. 252.

³⁶ Gouge, L9v.

or mistress.³⁷ This bondage contradicts their ‘free’ status. In 1667, Dinah, ‘a Black’ servant in Bristol was set to be illegally ‘transported to some foreign plantation’ by her mistress.³⁸ As it is recorded, Dinah’s case was brought to the Mayor’s Court:

Whereas one Dinah a Black hath lived as a servant to one Dorothy Smith within this City for the space of five years last past and since hath received Christian Baptism still desiring so to live here under the preaching of the Gospel and her said Mistress having secretly and against her will caused her to be conveyed aboard the ship Robert to be transported to some foreign plantations; Complaint whereof having been made to us and upon examination the truth of the premises appearing to us and her said mistress now refusing to take her into her service till the next General Sessions till this cause shall be there fully heard and determined. It is ordered that the said Dinah shall be at liberty to remain where she can get a being till those Sessions.³⁹

Dinah’s case, as Laura Gowing explains, was complicated ‘by her being Black and probably, previous enslaved’.⁴⁰ And yet, the court was persuaded to free her so she may stay in Bristol and work in service.⁴¹ Dinah’s case bridges the lacuna between ‘liberal’ and ‘servile’ service: her previous enslaved status and her race led her mistress to treat her as a servile servant, and yet the court recognises her as a ‘liberal’ and notably Christian servant. Within the archives, references to Black servants often describe their relationship to the household in which they serve: they are ‘servant of’, ‘servant to’, or ‘belonging to’ an individual. Although a ‘liberal’ servant, they are still bound by name to their white household.

In 1617, Paul Baynes, a prominent Cambridge preacher addressed these two separate forms of labour:

servants are either more slavish, or else more free and liberall: the first are such whose bodies are perpetually put under the power of the Master, as Blackmores with us. [...] [The second] are upon certaine termes or conditions for a certaine time onely

³⁷ Chakravarty, p. 4.

³⁸ Bristol Record Office, Mayor and Aldermen’s Committee: Orders of Mayor and Aldermen (1666– 1673), BA: M/BCC/MAY/1/3. As cited in Laura Gowing’s *Gender in Early Modern England*, Second Edition (London, New York: Routledge, 2023), docs p. 7.

³⁹ As cited in Gowing’s *Gender in Early Modern England*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Gowing, p. 7.

⁴¹ Gowing notes that Dinah’s ‘baptism gave some protection, as did the witnesses who came to support her’ (p. 7).

under the power of a man: such are our Apprentises, Journeymen, maide-servants, etc.⁴²

In the preacher's statement, he describes 'maide-servants' as being liberal servants, and Blackmores as being 'slavish': this places the elite Black female servant in a perplexing position, distinguished by race alone. She is neither a 'free' nor enslaved servant, neither autonomous nor a commodity of the household in which she serves. Slippages between service and slavery force us to reconsider how the construction of race affects our reading of these characters.⁴³

In *The Knight of Malta*, the Black female servant Zanthia (alias Abdella) presents, for the most part, as an elite female servant, 'free' and 'liberal'. She is first described as a 'Blackamore that waits upon' Oriana, the sister of the Grand Master of Malta (1.1.89). Early in the play, she orders Oriana's white gentlewoman about, appearing to occupy a superior household position: 'Hist, wenches: my Lady calls, she's entring the Tarrase, to see the show' (1.3.60). She later engages in a lively conversation with Oriana and another gentlewoman, Velleda, whom she describes as 'my fellow' (3.2.20). Multiple times throughout the play, she forges her mistress's hand, which, as I explained in the Introduction, indicates an elite servant status and education. Although Zanthia appears to occupy the same elite position as her white counterparts, scholars have read her to be of an 'inferior rank', distinguished by her race. Louise Denmead, for example, suggests that it is because of Zanthia's 'skin color and inferior rank' that she 'is seen to be of inferior value'.⁴⁴ Denmead's analysis of scholars' work of 'Dark-skinned women' in early modern drama also suggests that '[t]his common perception of black maids as morally

⁴² Paul Baynes, *An entire Commentary upon the Whole Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians* (London: R. Milbourne and I. Bartlett, 1643), p. 695. As quoted in Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, 'The Tempest and Early Modern Conceptions of Race' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 139-157, p. 146.

⁴³ Many thanks to Hassana Moosa for many productive conversations on the difference between service and slavery in early modern drama.

⁴⁴ Louise Denmead, 'The Discovery of Blackness in the Early Modern Bed Trick' in *The Invention of Discovery*, ed. James Dougal Fleming (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 153-67, p. 159.

reprehensible, and inherently less chaste than their class and racial counterparts [...] is based on skin colour and social rank'.⁴⁵ However, we must remember that we cannot justify reading characters as lower status because of their transgressive behaviour; actions alone do not determine social status. Zanthia does not hold an inferior position within Oriana's household and furthermore, Oriana does not treat her servant as either lower-status or as threatening. I suggest the play, in fact, posits Zanthia in a superior servant position as it is her elite access and authority which she exploits to cultivate advancement.

Zanthia's close proximity to her mistress, made possible by her elite position, licenses her with the authority necessary to corrupt the household in which she serves. Zanthia first forges Oriana's hand in a letter to the Turkish Basha which not only publicly challenges Oriana's 'spotless' virtue but also suggests that her mistress has committed treason in that she is willing to help the Ottomans conquer Malta. Zanthia's determination to ruin her mistress comes as a result of her ambition to win the French villain, Mountferrat's hand in marriage. She tells him, 'For love of thee *Mountferrat*, (Oh! what Chaines / Of deity, or duty can hold love?) / I have this answer fram'd, so like her hand / As if it had bin moulded of' (1.1.210-3). Zanthia acts as an agent of disruption: her elite access offers her patronage, through which she can act as a political go-between and confidante for her mistress, while simultaneously plotting on Mountferrat's behalf (his obsession with ruining Oriana has its roots in her initial rejection of him). I propose that it is Zanthia's elite position within the household and her appropriation of access which allows her to then corrupt her mistress and threaten social stability. Later in the play, Zanthia drugs her mistress with a sleeping potion (disguised as a cordial) which makes her appear dead. Conspiring with Mountferrat to rape and then murder Oriana in her crypt, the two are caught by

⁴⁵ Denmead, p. 156, 159.

Oriana's husband, Gomera. A fight ensues until Zanthia shoots Gomera in the arm; this attracts the attention of others which then leads to the arrest of Zanthia and Mountferrat. In the final scene, Mountferrat is stripped of his knighthood, forced to marry Zanthia, and both are banished from Malta. Her elite position enables her to perform such violent actions, from which she is able to cultivate social mobility.

However, Zanthia's position within the household is complicated by social constructions of her racial identity. In noble and merchant households in early modern England, Black servants, as Kim F. Hall notes, 'played an important role in the symbolic economy of elite culture'.⁴⁶ Although England was not yet fully participating in the Transatlantic slave trade, having Black servants, as Francesca Royster observes, 'was a fashionable thing to do – a way of staging wealth and worldliness'.⁴⁷ The brutal narrative of the Black servant as their master's or mistress's glamorous, worldly property emerges from within the early modern archives. For example, 'Barbaree, servant to Mr. Smith', embodies this worldliness through her name, one resonant of West Africa.⁴⁸ The archives identify Barbaree as both foreign and as the property of Mr. Smith. The presence of racialised servants in elite and merchant households was meant to signify the white master's wealth and status as an imperial consumer, while simultaneously valuing the servant as a foreign commodity.⁴⁹ However, the early modern ideologies used to assess the worth of Black servants often insist on defining and valuing the servant through race. We see this occur within the archives, as race-making is constructed rhetorically. Although the language is degrading and oftentimes blatantly racist, these records are valuable as they signify

⁴⁶ Hall, p. 211.

⁴⁷ Francesca Royster, "'Working Like a Dog': African Labor and Racing the Human-African Divide in Early Modern England' in *Writing Race Across the Atlantic World: Medieval to Modern*, eds. Philip D. Beidler and Gary Taylor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 113-134, p. 115.

⁴⁸ As cited in Habib, *Black Lives*, p. 3.

⁴⁹ See Hall, pp. 211-13.

how early modern English society constructed and valued Black servants as property. For example, in the will of Anne Bromley's first husband, 'a London merchant named Offley', there is reference to 'the gift of Dame Lady Ane Bromblie and a negro maid-servant of Mr Offlies that died longe since'.⁵⁰ Habib notes that 'Anne's overall personal history makes quite explainable her acquisition of an African maidservant through her previous paternal and marital affiliations with the merchant class, for whom such possessions are a cultural habit'.⁵¹ However, the presence of Black servants as signifiers of wealth was most explicit at court. Habib's scrutiny of the detailed lists of Princess Catherine's household staff (1501) discovers evidence of 'Two slaves to attend on the maids of honour'.⁵² He suggests 'these black figures, who are [...] in all probability female, are proud advertisements of an ambitious Christian Spain's recent imperial achievements'.⁵³ As a foreign commodity, the assumption is that these racialised servants would occupy a servile existence as a property of the household. Peter Erickson's study of the representation of race in Renaissance art examines what he describes as 'the black servant motif', in which, as 'a clearly identified social subordinate and implied racial inferior, the servant is typecast in the role of object'.⁵⁴ Although Zanthia employs her elite position within the household to pursue her own ambitions, she appears hyper-aware of her property-like status. In

⁵⁰ As cited in Habib, *Black Lives*, p. 147-8.

⁵¹ Habib, p. 148.

⁵² Habib, p. 23. Early on in his monograph, Habib explains his use of 'black' (notably written in lower-case): 'By "black people" here and throughout this book, I mean people particularly from the African continent, including Egypt, but expediently from the Americas and India as well, in conformity with the endemically loose way an early modern English cultural consciousness sees them [...] The only precision of the term "black" as a typological identifier of people - for the early modern English, and consequently for this study - is as a loose category of the non-white, non-English (as distinct from white but non-English people)' (p. 1, note 1). Whereas Habib and numerous other scholars use 'black' (lower-case) often as a 'typological identifier' or as a more general, unspecified term, I follow Crenshaw's use of 'Black' (capital-letter) to refer to a specific cultural group.

⁵³ Habib, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Peter Erickson, 'Invisibility Speaks: Servants and Portraits in Early Modern Visual Culture' in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2009, pp. 23-61, p.39. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40339610>>. See also Iman Sheeha's '[A] Maid Called Barbary': *Othello*, Moorish maidservants and the Black Presence in Early Modern England' in *Shakespeare Survey 75: Othello*, ed. Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 89-102, p. 98.

the first scene, when Montferrat attempts to use Zanthia's patronage to influence her mistress in his favour, she rebukes his covert intentions: 'like a property, when I have served / Your turns, you'll cast me off, or hang me up / For a sign, somewhere' (1.1.168-70). Ian Smith observes that 'the black body as commodified thing does not only emerge in the colonial aftermath of a slave and plantation economy; it has a fully articulated discursive life in the early modern English theatre'.⁵⁵ Zanthia's commodity status is heightened because of both her gender and race, despite her status as an elite female servant.

When, in act three scene two, Gomera tells of Lucinda's capture and how he wished to have acquired her as a 'welcome present' for Oriana, he suggests Lucinda would have acted 'as companion to thy faithful *Moor*' (3.2.80). Gomera associates Zanthia with a slavish status as he posits Lucinda as the compliment to Zanthia: they are made similar by their labour, gender, and religion as both Zanthia and Lucinda are Muslim women, bound to a form of service.

Dadabhoy's work on the women in *The Knight of Malta* draws attention to the play's treatment of Zanthia as a 'black, Muslim, female character' and to Lucinda's 'Ottoman heritage and Islamic religion'; she argues these characters are linked through gender and religious identity but made different by their skin colour.⁵⁶ As a slave and as property, Lucinda is valued for her chastity, youth, and fairness. Gomera describes Lucinda to be 'of such an exquisite form', 'well descended', and 'a virgin of fourteen' (3.2.82-5). I suggest that Lucinda's fairness and chastity increases her proprietorial worth as a slave in Gomera's eyes, whereas Zanthia's blackness downgrades her elite servant status. By treating the slave and servant as similar, coupling the

⁵⁵ Ian Smith, 'The Textile Black Body: race and 'shadowed livery' in *The Merchant of Venice*' in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 170-185, p. 184.

⁵⁶ Dadabhoy, p. 235, 254.

black female body with the fair slave's body, Gomera ignores labour differences and rather appears to amalgamate slavery with blackness.

However, Zanthia's status as a 'free and liberall' servant is made certain, I argue, by her ability to marry.⁵⁷ In their first scene, Mountferrat promises Zanthia marriage and advancement if she will assist him in destroying Oriana's reputation: 'I vow by heaven / *Malta*, I'll leave, in it my honours here, / And in some other Country, *Zanthia* make / My wife, and my best fortune' (1.1.197-200). This promise comes true: in the play's final scene, Valetta, the Grand Master of Malta, banishes both Zanthia and Mountferrat from Malta and forces them to marry: 'your doom is then / To marry this coagent of your mischiefs / Which done, we banish you from the continent' (5.2.274-6). The Grand Master can marry Zanthia off and banish her, precisely because she is not a slave and the direct property of Oriana's household. Although marriage to Zanthia might be Mountferrat's 'doom', she benefits from this arrangement. Like Zanthia's white counterparts, marriage releases her from elite service. Akhimie's analysis of conduct manuals suggests that there 'stood an "ideology of cultivation" – a set of commonly held beliefs about the moral and material benefits of self-improvement through the practice of good conduct'.⁵⁸ Conduct literature insists that good behaviour will be 'rewarded accordingly' and lead to social elevation.⁵⁹ Marriage, as I have shown, was often the reward for one's "good" service. However, it is through transgressive and violent behaviour that Zanthia is able to marry the man she desires. Mountferrat uses Zanthia for his own self-interest (destroying Orianna) and ultimately fails; she, in turn, exploits his weakness to secure their marriage. By engaging in bad behaviour

⁵⁷ Similarly, the ability to own property would also suggest a Black woman to be free rather than enslaved. Habib describes one 'Catellena' who lived in Almondsbury in Gloucestershire. When Catellena died, she left (in her will) a dresser. Habib notes that 'A slave would have been unlikely to own property so this suggests that she might have been free'. See Habib, *Black Lives*, p. 215.

⁵⁸ Akhimie, p. 8.

⁵⁹ Akhimie, p. 73.

to cultivate mobility, Zanthia undermines ideologies which were designed to ensure one was punished for transgressions. She manipulates her elite servant position to her advantage and ultimately succeeds in achieving her ambitions, despite the chaos she incites. It is important to recognise Zanthia's elite servant status in order to understand the context for her desired social mobility, which was so often central to the elite servants' experience on the early modern stage.

Although service and slavery were established as separate institutions of labour, slippages between the two are explicitly articulated in the character of Rhodaghond in William Percy's *A Forrest Tragedye in Vacunium*.⁶⁰ Rhodaghond is a Black woman in Tremellio (a Lord of Vacunium) and Fulvia's household. She tends to their daughter Florimel, and is in love with Florimel's tutor, Sir Jeptes. In act one scene three, we are first told by Clodio (a villainous, rejected suitor) that Rhodaghond is Florimel's 'waiting woman'(101r). She appears as Florimel's elite female servant. However, confusingly, in act two scene one, Fulvia, the mistress of the household, reminds Rhodaghond of her subordinate and slavish position, and to whom she is bound:

Rhodaghond, thou knowest, I neede not tell,
(For so I should but rippe the Benefite)
How, of a little one I bought thee once,
To tend upon my daughter Florimel,
More, in all which tyme, thou knowest too,
What have beene thy dayes that thou hast spent,
How faire the life, how sweet the servitude
(102v)

Rhodaghond has been purchased by Fulvia to 'tend upon' Florimel and is therefore bound to a life of indentured servitude. She appears to be in service to Florimel as her waiting woman but enslaved to Fulvia. Her position, as subordinate to two mistresses, forces her into a position of

⁶⁰ Hereafter, this manuscript will be referred to as *A Forrest Tragedye*.

household conflict. As I will discuss in Chapter Four in my analysis of *Othello*, having two mistresses or masters obfuscates clear hierarchies of service that were required to maintain household order. Percy's co-articulation of elite service and slavery complicates Rhodagond's household position and identity. Chakravarty notes that 'the moment of the vending of the body is the moment of absolute corporeal ownership. To transact something – even an indentured servant – one must have claim to it'.⁶¹ In this scene, Fulvia's reference to Rhodagond's vendibility – 'I bought thee once' – serves as a reminder of her property and slave status. Amanda Bailey suggests that 'even before a person could be constructed as a form of property, there had to be an initial conception of liberty that rested on the notion that to have one's property forcibly taken reduced one to the status of a slave'.⁶² As Fulvia narrates Rhodagond's history of bondage, her description of sweet servitude (like the concept of "happy slavery") posits Rhodagond within economies of slavery.⁶³ Fulvia's insistence on gratitude, that Rhodagond has lived a 'faire' life in 'sweet' 'servitude', depicts slavery in her household as a more positive experience than she otherwise could have been subjected to. Fulvia's articulation of sweet servitude very much resembles the opening of Terance's *Andria*, when Simo reminds Sosia: 'After I had bought thee, being then a little one, thou alwaies knowest how iust [and] with me how gentle thy bondage was'.⁶⁴ By recasting bondage as a positive experience, Fulvia reinforces the narrative of the happy slave from the perspective of the white enslaver.

⁶¹ Chakravarty, p. 133.

⁶² Amanda Bailey, *Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 24.

⁶³ For more on "happy slavery" see Chapter Five in Chakravarty's *Fictions of Consent*.

⁶⁴ As cited in Chakravarty's *Fictions of Consent*, p. 176.

Fulvia begins this scene by reminding Rhodaghond to whom she is bound so she may use her slave to orchestrate an adulterous ‘enterprise’ with her husband’s friend, Affranio (102v).

Fulvia confides in Rhodaghond her plot to sneak Affranio into the castle:

There stands abutting in our Castell wall
A hidden vault with bushes over grown
That they do cover the whole Mouth of him,
Whereto abutting, at our chamber Foote,
Standeth a doore by reason of his site,
These many yeares, worn out of memory;
Thither, this day, whilst Phoebus flyes the Plaine
In Person hee'le resort, Hold, here, the keye,
And by a scale, that shall be let down to you,
Passe him through the two-leav'd cazement first,
So thence into my chamber privilye.

(103r)

By bestowing Rhodaghond with keys to the castle vault, Fulvia not only implicates Rhodaghond in her plot, but also abdicates her household authority. Amanda Flather notes that possession of household keys signified ‘control over access to the house and use of its rooms’.⁶⁵ As Fulvia relinquishes control, the passing of the keys metaphorically serves to represent the passing of authority. It is in this moment that power dynamics shift between the mistress and slave.

Rhodaghond seizes upon this opportunity to bargain with Fulvia: ‘Madame, if that, for my long services, / You’ll but promise mee Sir Jeptes in marriage, / I would do any thing you’ll have mee to’ (103r). In Chapter Two I explored how elite female servants negotiate and engage in economic, sexual, and political exchanges to cultivate mobility and to ultimately leave service. By engaging in an exchange with her mistress, Rhodaghond insists on creating her own identity apart from the household. When Fulvia responds to her request, ‘I will by Jove [...] And I helpe thee to Jeptes’, Rhodaghond cements their agreement by acknowledging, ‘So / And shall lyke

⁶⁵ Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Suffolk, Rochester: Boydell Press, 2007), p. 46.

your Ladship a bargaine' (103r). This negotiation is doubly significant: not only will Rhodaghond be relinquished from the household following a final act of servitude, but also, by acquiring the right to marry, she will be defined as a free woman. By participating in her mistress's transgressive enterprise, Rhodaghond seeks to shed her "slavish" status.

Rhodaghond's position within the household is made complicated by her dual slave and elite servant status. Her relationship with Florimel resembles the relationship between a mistress and her elite female servant that we frequently see depicted across early modern drama. Rhodaghond first accompanies Florimel as Lord Amadour courts her. She witnesses their plan to elope and later assists Florimel as she dresses and packs to meet her lover. Like in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598), in which we see the waiting gentlewoman, Margaret, help Hero to dress on her wedding day and discuss the bridal night, Rhodaghond and Florimel, too, inhabit the same intimate and elite relationship. In act three scene five, when the women are alone, Florimel asks, 'Tell me, sweet Rhodaghond, what Pastyme shall wee find now to pass the tyme until our Bridalls jaunt?' (110v). Rhodaghond suggests, 'Let us ghesch by Palmestrye, how many Husbands wee shall have a Peice, either of us, Madame' (111r). Florimel rejects this idea and instead proposes that the women will try their Fortunes and 'pluck of all the sortes of fruites that be conteyned in this grove of Love, And see, what the God will suggest to us is the Application of them' (111r). The women's ensuing witty conversation distinguishes their version of the ideal man, coupling such 'elements' and attributes to fruit (111r). Florimel first picks a cherry, 'For it betoakes that my gallant Gentleman [...] will give mee cheare enough before it be many howres, Rhodaghond, I troe' (111r). Rhodaghond then chooses 'this dangling Peare' and Florimel jokingly scolds her, 'Fitly Mary, For thy husband will be thy Peere' (111r). Their conversation quickly turns sexual when Rhodaghond claims that she will instead pick a

strawberry and Florimel replies, 'A strawe for thy Berry, so thy Husband will say when he finds thee' (111r). Whereas in *Much Ado*, it is Margaret, the elite servant, who leads their conversation toward sexual innuendo when she suggests Hero's heart will 'be heavier soon by the weight of a man', in *A Forrest Tragedye*, it is Florimel who shifts the nature of their conversation from the ideal husband to the sexualised man (3.4.25).⁶⁶ Although this scene is without much substance, seeming only, as Florimel suggests, to pass the time, it speaks to the intimate nature of Florimel's relationship with Rhodaghond. Their relationship is built on trust and loyalty. Rhodaghond tends to Florimel's physical and emotional needs as an elite female servant would: she not only helps her to dress but also assists in arranging her elopement, and together the two women, like so many mistresses and elite servants, candidly discuss marriage, love, and sex.

The ways in which both these plays simultaneously evoke metaphors of slavery and service shape our reading of their elite Black female servants. Rhodaghond first appears as a waiting woman, but as Fulvia discloses her narrative of enslavement, her position within the household becomes more complex. Zanthia is an elite servant, but her transgressive behaviour and stereotypes of blackness have led scholars to read her as lower status. As I will explore in the following sections, Zanche in Webster's *The White Devil* clearly presents as an elite female servant as she tends to her mistress's personal needs and participates in her affairs. Although references to blackness within these plays are tempered with references to transgressive behaviour, I propose that we should read Black female servants as equal in status to their white counterparts. It is important to be aware of the slippages between service and slavery, and between domestic and elite service in early modern drama, for these nuances inform us of a

⁶⁶ William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, The Arden Third Series, ed. Claire McEachern (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2006).

character's position within the household and can transform our reading of popular and forgotten narratives within early modern English drama. In the next section, I consider how racialised language constructs the elite Black female servant and her white mistress, and the ways in which these characters are both juxtaposed and connected. I demonstrate how the interplay between status and race within discourses of colour intensify hierarchies of alterity.

Discourses of Colour

In act two scene four of *A Forrest Tragedye*, Florimel hastens Rhodaghond to help her prepare herself: 'hast thee, sweet wench, / Farr furth as Art and Nature will afford mee / I will be pleasing in my Lovers eye' (104r). Rhodaghond responds to her mistress:

If Nature had allotted mee but half
The Faire she hath endewd your Honour with
I troe I would not spill so large a grace
With Paintings, oyles and slubberdash of Art
(104v)

In an exchange which uses racialised language and anti-cosmetic rhetoric to reflect on female desirability, Rhodaghond employs a comparison of colour – between her own blackness and Florimel's 'faire' skin – to advise against Florimel's use of cosmetic painting. This prompts Florimel to ask her servant whether she has ever had a lover, '[f]or by thy Talk, it seemes thou hadst not any' (104v). Rhodaghond responds that she has won Sir Jeptes's heart, and the following exchange ensues:

<i>Florimel</i>	But tell me, prithy, pretie Rhodaghond, For what should Sir Jeptes fancye thee! Or for thy faire face, or for thy good body!
<i>Rhodaghond</i>	Lady myne, though I be black, you be white, Aegipt do paint, they say, their Devil white. And why not then, I pray, Sir Jeptes, That hath Aegyptus wisdom in his Brest Account my black as faire as you your white! (104v)

What is striking in this scene is how discourses of colour intensify hierarchies of alterity within the female service relationship. Florimel believes her whiteness to be superior to Rhodaghond's blackness. She reads her white race as analogous to her noble status. It is notable that the women do not passively comment on beauty standards, but rather actively set themselves against the other to determine who is supposedly racially superior. Rhodaghond suggests that her mistress's cosmetics are a stain – a 'spill' or 'slubberdash' – on her honour. Akhimie observes that '[b]lackness as a mark symbolizes that immutable status in which no behaviour, good or bad, can alter one's reputation'.⁶⁷ Akhimie suggests that stigmatised somatic markers serve to evaluate worth and circumscribe agency. Rhodaghond scrutinises the value and superiority behind her mistress's whiteness, and Florimel, in turn, questions how Rhodaghond's blackness could ever be read as beautiful. In *A Forrest Tragedye*, the women employ discourses of colour to probe defining characteristics of idealised femininity, as well as those of racial superiority. Although they differentiate themselves through race, their status allows them to converse in a more equally matched way. In Hall's study, she links tropes of blackness and of fairness to the formation of English national identity, arguing that 'the English/European division of beauty into "white" and "black" not only served aesthetic purposes but supported an ideology that still continues to serve the interests of white supremacy and male hegemony'.⁶⁸ As early modern writers grapple with distinguishing foreign strangers from domestic familiars, they employ tropes of blackness and dark/fair binaries to formulate notions of the self in contrast to the other, of beauty versus undesirability, and of moral goodness as opposed to immoral deviance. This binary colour-codes

⁶⁷ Akhimie, p. 53.

⁶⁸ Hall, p. 4.

the construction of femininity: whiteness symbolises purity and morality, whereas blackness becomes a signifier of alterity and transgressive behaviour.

In *The Knight of Malta*, discourses of colour work to distinguish between Oriana, the noble, white and chaste mistress, and Zanthia, her Black and deviant servant. In order to establish hierarchies of alterity, and to denote innocence from sin, the play incites colorism in its colour-coded and racialised rhetoric. As Noémie Ndiaye explains, colorism is ‘a system of power attuned to chromatic nuances’ in which ‘shades of skin tone correlate with specific amounts of social privilege, and proximity to whiteness is rewarded by all’.⁶⁹ When Oriana is wrongly accused of treason and put on trial, she draws on racial and social associations of whiteness to form her defense. Oriana defends herself first by deconstructing the significance of whiteness and then by reapplying and fixing that same colour to her body: ‘Behold me in this spotless white I weare, / The Embleme of my life, of all my actions, / So ye shall find my story, though I perish’ (2.5.35-37). Dadabhoy observes that ‘Oriana’s innocence rests in the visibility of her virtue’.⁷⁰ By claiming whiteness as the ‘emblem’ of her life, Oriana seeks to produce her innocence through colour. Arthur Little Jr. observes that ‘[i]n Shakespeare’s England whiteness was a property to be claimed by the relative elite’.⁷¹ Whiteness serves as a reminder of Oriana’s innocence, of her elite and noble status, and of her femininity. However, within whiteness (as within blackness) exist varying degrees of alteration. Little notes that ‘not all “white-skinned” individuals, or “white-skinned” English persons, had equal access and derived equal cachet from

⁶⁹ Noémie Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), p. 122.

⁷⁰ Dadabhoy, p. 251.

⁷¹ Arthur Little Jr., ‘Is it Possible to Read Shakespeare through Critical White Studies?’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 268-280, p. 271.

whiteness as property'.⁷² Jean E. Feerick, too, suggests that early modern drama insistently locates 'differences of colour in relation [...] to the differences of blood'; she explains that 'differences of colour emerge, as it were, in dialectical relation to social rank, allowing social tensions originating with the difference or rank to be resolved, mitigated, or exploited with reference to this emerging difference of colour'.⁷³ In her defense, Oriana employs her white skin colour as the symbol of her status and virtue. She pleads with her 'noble Brother' and the 'friends to vertue' that witness her trial; her aristocratic judges are very much like her: 'noble', 'honourable' and virtuous (2.5.29-31). Kyle Grady suggests that 'whiteness begins to figure in the early modern period as an aspirational concept – one at once attached to phenotype, but one more specifically formulated and reformulated as a category of privilege'.⁷⁴ In this moment, whiteness not only represents Oriana's femininity and moral virtue, but it is also used as a racial category to link Oriana to her noble, white 'friends' of privilege. Oriana employs whiteness to mark herself as similar to her judges. The credence of her innocence lies in the infallibility of her whiteness and within whiteness's imbued traits of nobility, chastity, and privilege.

The rhetoric surrounding Zanthia's blackness, on the other hand, provokes uncertainty and danger. In early modern England, blackness was viewed as the hegemonic inferior to whiteness, signifying not only a darker skin colour but also immoral action. Black skin, as Dadabhoy notes, 'had its own set of negatively coded meanings. Black was evil and sinful'.⁷⁵ Religious associations of blackness with the devil and classical comparisons of blackness with

⁷² Little Jr, p. 271.

⁷³ Jean E. Feerick, *Strangers in Blood: Relocating Race in the Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 4-5.

⁷⁴ Kyle Grady, "'Envy of Pale Hew': Whiteness and Division in 'Fair Verona'" in *White People in Shakespeare: Essays on Race, Culture and the Elite*, ed. Arthur Little Jr. (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2023), pp. 91-104, p. 92.

⁷⁵ Dadabhoy, p. 242.

hell made the colour synonymous with sin, damnation, and deviance. In *The Knight of Malta*, Zanthia is repeatedly described as ‘black’, a ‘Moor’ and a ‘devil’. Whereas the term ‘Black’ describes both skin colour and, as Crenshaw has argued, cultural groups, the term ‘Moor’ not only referred to a darker skin colour but also carried shifting religious, geographical, national meanings.⁷⁶ As Michael Neill explains, the term ‘Moor’ was indeterminate:

insofar as it was a term of racial description, it could refer quite specifically to the Berber-Arab people of the part of North Africa then rather vaguely denominated as "Morocco," "Mauritania," or "Barbary"; or it could be used to embrace the inhabitants of the whole North African littoral; or it might be extended to refer to Africans generally (whether "white," "black," or "tawny" Moors); or, by an even more promiscuous extension, it might be applied (like "Indian") to almost any darker-skinned peoples even, on occasion, those of the New World.⁷⁷

The rapid expansion of exploration and trade throughout the end of the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century not only increased English exposure to foreign cultures, but also prompted fears of the threat of alterity, which as Neill notes, ‘had traditionally been contained’.⁷⁸

Furthermore, Dadabhoy observes that the term ‘Moor’ ‘indicated not only dark or black skin but also suggested a Muslim religious identity’.⁷⁹ English awareness of the Ottoman empire’s power heightened fears of Islam and of blackness. As Clare McManus notes, ‘[i]n a moment when England looked with equal fear and enthusiasm towards Europe, fearful of Counter-Reformation infiltration and vocal in the call for war in support of the Palatinate, travel and the encounter with the foreign Other become fraught ideas. The deeply felt danger of the insinuating Other is reflected in aesthetic representation and theatrical form’.⁸⁰ In *The Knight of Malta*, the threat of

⁷⁶ Crenshaw, p. 1244.

⁷⁷ Michael Neill, ‘“Mulattos,” ‘Blacks,’ and ‘Indian Moors’: *Othello* and Early Modern Constructions of Human Difference’ in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 49, 4, 1998, pp. 361-374, p. 364.

⁷⁸ Neill, p. 366.

⁷⁹ Dadabhoy, p. 242.

⁸⁰ Clare McManus, ‘“Constant Changelings”, Theatrical Form, and Migration: Stage Travel in the Early 1620s’ in *Travel and Drama in Early Modern England*, eds. Claire Jowett and David McManus (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 2018), pp. 207-229, p. 213.

‘the insinuating Other’ is reflected through the character of Zanthia, who is both a cultural and religious outsider *and* a household insider. Dadabhoy suggests that the play ‘conflates racial and religious difference in the designation of Moor to create a figure that elicits anxiety based on the Moor’s blackness while simultaneously produced by the suggestion of Islamic traits’.⁸¹ In Zanthia’s case, her blackness sparks anxieties of her concealed strength and power, and her ability to infect the community from within. Throughout the play, as Bindu Malieckal notes, ‘references to Zanthia’s blackness are tempered with references to her immorality’.⁸² When Mountferrat believes Zanthia to have murdered Oriana, he exclaims, ‘And thou, in thy black shape, and blacker actions / Being hels perfect character, art delighted / To do what I, though infinitely wicked, / Tremble to hear’, coupling her racial darkness to her moral darkness. (4.1.63-6). Mountferrat’s construction of Zanthia’s race becomes body-centred. It is Zanthia’s ‘black shape, and blacker actions’ which makes her ‘hels perfect character’; he locates her transgressive actions and body within a narrative of blackness.

Although the play makes visible the moral differences between mistress and servant through discourses of colour, early on, Mountferrat disregards understandings of race as representative of status, sexuality, or religion, as he conflates the mistress with her servant.

It is not love, but strong Libidinous will
That triumphs o’er me, and to satiat that,
What difference twixt this Moore, and her fair Dame?
Night makes their hews alike, their use is so,
Whose hand is so subtle, he can colours name,
If he do winck, and touch ‘em? lust being blind,
Never in women did distinction find.

(1.1.219-25)

⁸¹ Dadabhoy, p. 243.

⁸² Malieckal, p. 59.

Mountferrat's acknowledgement of the interchangeability of Black servant and white mistress removes readings of social difference in terms of race and also social status. In Chapter Two I discussed how the similitude of mistress and servant highlights the anxieties caused by men's inability to perceive a woman's elite or chaste status. When visibility is removed, hierarchies of alterity cease to exist. A woman is valued for being a woman, not for the defining qualities of inherent value such as the construction of her race, sexuality, status, or religion. Mountferrat suggests that in darkness, Oriana's and Zanthia's race, sexuality, status and religion are the same. The women are connected by their sexuality and gender, as all other social determinants of distinction are ignored. When Zanthia acknowledges the similarities between herself and Oriana, 'I am as full of pleasure in the touch / As ere a white fac'd puppet of 'em all', she, too, disregards social hierarchies of alterity to equate her own value and sexual ability to that of her white mistress (1.1.181-2). Moments like these encourage a more nuanced reading of how the construction of race is socially determined. The amalgamation of mistress and servant dissolves the strict black/white binary, hinting at a more malleable racial and sexual identity for both white and Black women.

The ways in which discourses of colour intricately conflate and yet also differentiate mistress and servant is present in Webster's *The White Devil*. Vittoria, the mistress, is emblematically portrayed as the white devil of the play, whose white exterior and beauty disguises her dark interior. Benedict Robinson notes that '[i]n merging beauty, whiteness and virtue, the phrase 'white devil' puts a premium on white femininity'.⁸³ Robinson suggests that Zanche, her Black female servant, then 'serves as a continual reminder of the racial meanings of the phrase: at a purely discursive level, Zanche is already there as a kind of absent presence in

⁸³ Robinson, p. 31.

the play's title'.⁸⁴ Therefore, if Vittoria is the white devil of the play, Zanche is, by association, presumed to be the black devil. Throughout *The White Devil*, discourses of blackness and whiteness are coarticulated in the female service relationship. During Vittoria's arraignment, in which she is accused of murder, the rhetoric of blackness is used against both mistress and servant. Vittoria is not only a 'devil' and a 'whore', but her 'black lust' and 'black concatenation of mischief' are characteristic of a 'debauched and diversivolent woman' (3.2.28-30, 108-9).⁸⁵ Her immoral transgressions are described through discourses of blackness. Zanche is then linked to her mistress through that same blackness and deviance. When Monticelso sentences Vittoria to 'a house of convertites', he unjustifiably charges Zanche as Vittoria's 'bawd [...] the Moor' alongside her mistress (3.2.263-4). Because of their service relationship, the two women are bound, identified not as the antitheses of each other but as mirrored images of sameness.

As the male characters attempt to establish a world in which a woman's physical appearance is representative of her moral virtues, the women prove that this ideology can be undermined by exposing the multifarious ways through which skin colour and female virtue can be performed. During Vittoria's trial, Monticelso accuses her of masking her pretence behind the performance of whiteness. 'I shall be plainer with you, and paint out / Your follies in more natural red and white / Than that upon your cheek' (3.2.51-3). If the visibility of racial differences is essential to determining a natural social order, a woman's ability to conceal or reconstruct the presentation of her racial identity challenges social hierarchies of alterity. Monticelso draws on the word 'paint' to explain how he will illustrate Vittoria's transgressions, concealed by the white paint (cosmetics) plastered on her face. Hall observes that '[t]he painted

⁸⁴ Robinson, p. 31.

⁸⁵ The term 'diversivolent' appears twice in *The White Devil*; according to the *OED*, it is defined as 'desiring strife', although the word is only cited in this play. Robinson's gloss of 'diversivolent' considers how 'the word may suggest a desire that always seeks novelty. The primary point is clearly the obscurity itself' (see p. 176).

woman often represents concerns over female unruliness, the power of whiteness, and the power of descriptive display'.⁸⁶ Women's ability to artificially construct their own image kindled anxieties about female honesty and virtue: cosmetic artifice allows women to cultivate and display an idealised image of femininity while simultaneously concealing their natural state. Cosmetic whiteness, as Farah Karim-Cooper explains, 'was considered by some (mainly Puritans and anti-theatrical moralists of the period) to be a lie [...] Pretending to embody the ideal complexion seems to have been considered almost as bad as, if not worse than not having white skin at all'.⁸⁷ Cosmetics disrupt social categories and hierarchies of alterity as somatic markers of status, virtue, race, and nationhood are obscured. The lack of visibility meant that women had the ability to blur categories of difference to manipulate and construct their identity.⁸⁸ In Chapter Two I discussed how the physical signs of virginity are not only impossible to read but also unreliable. As *The White Devil* makes clear, it is difficult to fix and make certain the purity of whiteness for women had the ability to conceal and mask or manipulate their skin colour, undermining male interpretations of their bodies. Anxieties about the visibility, mutability, and authenticity of Vittoria's whiteness are exacerbated by discourses of colour. As Monticleso accuses Vittoria of manipulating whiteness to cover her transgressions, he highlights how reading the construction of race and sexuality through the body's physical signs is unreliable. The 'natural red' he references (blushing) was understood in the early modern period to be either a sign of virtue or an indication of guilt. Derek Dunne explains that '[I]nked as it was to the

⁸⁶ Hall, p. 89.

⁸⁷ Farah Karim-Cooper, 'The Materials of Race: Staging the Black and White Binary in Early Modern Theatre' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 17-29, p. 23.

⁸⁸ Anti-cosmetic treatises often complain that cosmetics inhibit men from properly distinguishing a woman's rank, race, and virtue. For more on this, see Kimberly Poitevin's article 'Inventing Whiteness: Cosmetics, Race, and Women in Early Modern England' in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Spring/Summer 2011, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011), pp. 59-89; Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

sudden movement of blood to defend the face, a blush could be understood variously as a sign of guilt or indicative of chastity, albeit with an implicit awareness of sexuality'.⁸⁹ In suggesting that her blush is unnatural and therefore indicative of her sins, Monticleso employs discourses of whiteness against Vittoria to paint her as the transgressive, and therefore impure and tainted, woman.

A woman's reputation can be simultaneously described through discourses of blackness and of whiteness. Later in the play, Zanche employs tropes of blackness to woo Mulinassar (the Duke of Florence disguised in blackface). She tells him: 'I ne'er loved my complexion till now, / 'Cause I may boldly say without a blush / I love you' (5.1.219-221). Zanche uses racial stereotypes of blackness's inability to show blush to suggest that if her blackness restricts her from concealing her emotions then her love cannot be hidden. By claiming to love Mulinassar 'without a blush', Zanche draws on issues of the legibility of whiteness to establish the authenticity of her love. Similarly, in *The Knight of Malta*, Zanthia claims her blackness prevents her from putting 'on a feigned blush, / To make me seem more modest than I am' (1.1.173-4). Both Zanche and Zanthia use discourses of whiteness and stereotypes of their inability to blush to emphasise their authenticity, setting the certainty and invariability of their blackness against the mutability of whiteness. As Emma Whipday notes, '[i]n a play where blushes are defined in relation to whiteness, Zanche defines her blackness as implying the inability (visibly) to blush'.⁹⁰ These plays intermingle discourses of blackness and whiteness in mistress-servant relationships,

⁸⁹ Derek Dunne, 'Blushing on Cue: The Forensics of the Blush in Early Modern Drama' in *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 34.2 (Summer 2016), pp. 233-52, p. 234.

⁹⁰ Emma Whipday, "'Thou Look'st Pale': Narrating Blanching and Blushing on the Early Modern Stage' in *Playing and Playgoing in Early Modern England: Actor, Audience and Performance*, eds. Simon Smith and Emma Whipday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 37-56, p. 51.

demonstrating the nuanced ways in which the black/white binary simultaneously constructs the women as different and as similar.

As Zanche pursues Mulinassar, she manipulates the cultural associations of both her race and her elite service position to seduce him. However, her attempt to woo Mulinassar is thwarted by his announcement that: 'I have vowed never to marry' (5.1.94, 224). This causes Zanche to change tactics. Rather than engaging in a romantic exchange, Zanche instead proposes an economic exchange with Mulinassar:

Yet you may mistake my wealth. For, as when ambassadors are sent to
congratulate princes there's commonly sent along with them a rich
present – so that though the prince like not the ambassador's person nor
words, yet he likes well of the presentment – so I may come to you in the
same manner and be better loved for my dowry than my virtue.
(5.1.226-232)

To mitigate her blackness, she offers him wealth. She woos him with money, which not only acts as a substitution for her blackness, but also confirm her social desirability as a woman of means. When he brushes her off saying 'I'll think on the motion', she offers more: 'At your better leisure / I'll tell you things shall startle your blood' (5.1.233-6). In Chapter Two I analysed how a woman's elite household positions offers her the ability to negotiate and value her worth. Zanche, like her white counterparts, uses her elite household position to instigate this exchange with Mulinassar. Her elite position as Vittoria's servant grants her an intimate knowledge of the household's secrets and transgressions, and access to her mistress's personal belongings. She exploits her role as a household insider to cultivate mobility. A few scenes later, Zanche informs Mulinassar that she will rob her mistress of 'coin and jewels', which shall serve as 'a dowry, / Methinks, should make that sunburnt proverb false, / And wash the Ethiop white' (5.3.263-8). By suggesting that her dowry will mitigate her blackness, and even achieve the impossible – 'wash the Ethiop white' – Zanche acknowledges how her race is constructed alongside status and

gender differences. She is unable to change her blackness but can supplement it with wealth and mobility. Zanche recognises the immutability of blackness and the ways in which, as an elite female servant, she can manipulate her race to construct her desired identity.

In the figure of the elite Black female servant, playwrights pair anxieties of blackness with anxieties of the elite female servant to draw attention to the threat of the outsider within. Because of the intimate nature of an elite servant's relationship with her mistress, the Black female servant has the ability to corrupt the household in which she serves. This corruption is often interpreted as a moral darkness and articulated through discourses of blackness. The linking of blackness with the foreign stranger, with social disorder, and with the female body, makes the elite Black female body the site through which dangers of cross-cultural contact are embodied. The indelibility of blackness and its ability to penetrate and alter whiteness provoked anxieties of disorder and of the foreign stranger infiltrating the early modern English household. In this section I considered how discourses of colour intermingle blackness and whiteness to set the mistress and servant comparatively against the other, yet also connects them in many ways and suggests their interchangeability – offering a more nuanced reading of how the plays construct female service relationships. In the next section, I build on this to examine how the Black female servant mobilises anxieties of kinship within the early modern household as she is positioned as both a household insider and a cultural outsider.

Anxieties of Kinship

In the early modern period, anxieties of blackness – as a phenotype, and as a symbol of one's race, religion, or nationality – were stoked by fears of its ability to overpower whiteness. These fears were frequently co-articulated with anxieties about preserving a 'pure', and therefore, white

and noble bloodline. In Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton's introduction to *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion*, they explain:

Writings of the period amply demonstrate that the idea of race as bloodline was in fact developing at this time, often in complex articulation with other meanings. Thus, when Jewish or Muslim identities are compared to black skin, or when writers such as Best, Sandys, Moryson, Spenser, and Africanus describe black skin and religious difference alike in terms of "infections," the comparisons do not suggest that religion is a more changeable affiliation, but in fact fix both religion and skin color as essential and passed on from parent to child'.⁹¹

This concept of racial inferiority as an infection, being passed down in the family through blood, was commonplace in early modern England – and it was women on whom anxieties of a racialised blood lineage were repositied. Concerns of sexual reproduction within the early modern household are motivated by the figure of the elite Black female servant. In each of these three texts, the Black female servant engages in an interracial relationship. However, it is, I contend, during these moments of staged romantic activity between an elite Black female servant and a white man in which the virility of white hegemony is challenged. In this final section, I interrogate how these moments not only spark violence but also nourish dynamics of exclusion within the household, drawing attention to the ways in which racial identity is made to take precedence over a character's elite social status.

As ideologies of race and blood converge within the early modern household, their entanglement with hierarchies of status and competing systems of alterity conflate in order to identify kin – those who are domestic familiars – from strangers.⁹² The *OED* defines 'kin' as '[a]

⁹¹ Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton, *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 23.

⁹² I use the term 'stranger' because in early modern England, this was used to describe 'foreign-born national residents'. However, as the editors of *Keywords of Identity, Race and Human Mobility* note: 'Tracing these terms is challenging, precisely because of the shifting and ambiguous nature of the descriptors. [...] 'stranger' became used in the middle of the fifteenth century to denote an individual from one country who resided in another, originating from the old French *etrangier*, an outsider'. For more how the definition of 'stranger' refers to both foreign and domestic characteristics, see Nandini Das, João Vicente Melo, Haig Smith, and Lauren Working (eds.), *Keywords of*

group of persons descended from a common ancestor, and so connected by blood-relationship'.⁹³ However, the curious interplay between kinship and race is embodied through their shared definitions. The primary meaning of 'race' in the early modern period was '[a] group of persons descended from a common ancestor; a house, family, kindred'.⁹⁴ Race, like kinship, holds familial valency. Models of kinship encompass those who are blood or affinal kin as well as those who are proximal kin.⁹⁵ Servants, therefore, fall under the category of proximal kin in the early modern household.⁹⁶ Although kinship works to unite, it can also be the vehicle, as Chakravarty suggests, 'for forms of alterity as much as for the reproduction of similitude'.⁹⁷ In these plays, models of kinship paradoxically work to include and exclude the Black female servant from the household. She is conceptualised as a household insider (proximal kin) because of her service position and as a cultural outsider because of her skin colour and non-kin status. However, it is specifically moments in which the Black female servant is excluded (which often correlate with the visibility of interracial relationships) in which household order begins to unravel.

In *The White Devil*, Zanche's exclusion from the household is most explicit when her interracial and cross-status relationship with Flaminio is publicly observed. From the play's

Identity, Race, and Human Mobility in Early Modern England (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), pp. 20-29.

⁹³ 'kin, n. 1', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (2022)

<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/103433#eid40175227>> [Accessed 18 Oct. 2022].

⁹⁴ 'race, n. 6', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (2022) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/157031>> [Accessed 18. 10. 2022].

⁹⁵ Marjorie Rubright suggests that the word "Proximity" comes from the Latin *proximitās*, which literally means the state of being nearest, "nextness". In early modern English, "proximity" was used both to describe a spatial relation and to describe relations of affiliation, such as kinship'. See Marjorie Rubright, *Doppelganger Dilemmas: Anglo-Dutch Relations in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 4.

⁹⁶ Many thanks to Lydia Valentine for her insight into race and kinship in early modern England.

⁹⁷ Urvashi Chakravarty, 'More Than Kin, Less than Kind: Similitude, Strangeness, and Early Modern English Homonationalisms' in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67.1 (2016), pp. 14-29, p. 22.

outset, we are aware that Zanche and Flaminio are close as he employs her to act on his master's behest. Flaminio positions Zanche as a household insider as she works to bring his master and her mistress together. However, it is not until act five that the nature of their relationship emerges. When Flaminio and his brother Marcello enter, with Zanche in tow, Marcello asks '[w]hy doth this devil haunt you so? Say.' (5.1.86). Flaminio states he does not know, in an attempt to distance himself from Zanche, to which Marcello denounces him, stating: 'She is your shame' (5.1.91). Marcello registers Zanche to be part of Flaminio, linked through discourses of colour. In Thomas Wilson's *A Christian Dictionary* (1612), he defines 'shame' as: 'An affection which springeth, by reason of some ciuill dishonesty or filthinesse, appearing in the countenance by blushing'.⁹⁸ Shame, as Lesel Dawson notes, 'allows one to see the self as 'other' [...] it also acts as a powerful disciplinary force that bolsters conservative gender roles, reinforces traditional social hierarchies and punishes non-normative behaviour'.⁹⁹ Although shame is considered to be an emotion (embodied by blushing), Marcello turns it into one of his brother's external properties.¹⁰⁰ He suggests shame is synonymous with the black female body: the body of Zanche which is 'owned' by Flaminio. She is his shame: she therefore embodies the blush that he does not express himself. The irony in this should not go unnoticed, for Zanche supposedly cannot blush or show shame because of her dark skin. And yet, Marcello conceptualises her to be the physical embodiment of Flaminio's shame. Through this metonymic image, he highlights the "non-normative" nature of their interracial relationship. In early modern drama, attitudes towards

⁹⁸ Thomas Wilson, *A Christian Dictionary* (London, 1612). Accessed via the Lexicons of Early Modern English (LEME) database, < <https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry/308/2094>> [Accessed 12.05.2023].

⁹⁹ Lesel Dawson, 'Shame: *A Lover's Complaint*, *Coriolanus*, *The Rape of Lucrece*' in *Shakespeare and Emotion* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 238-252, p. 239.

¹⁰⁰ For more on shame in early modern drama, see Jennifer Panek, 'Shame and Pleasure in *The Changeling*' in *Renaissance Drama*, Volume 42, Issue 2, 2014, pp. 191-215; Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1993).

non-white, non-kin characters are intent on fashioning blackness as a physical and moral blemish.

Whereas Marcello clearly marks Zanche by her alterity, denoting her to be a cultural outsider, Flaminio's conflicting feelings toward Zanche as both desirable and undesirable, as a familiar and as a stranger, complicate her positionality within the household. Later in the scene, Hortensio tells Flaminio, 'I hear she [Zanche] claims marriage of thee', to which he replies, 'Faith, I made to her some such dark promise, and in seeking to fly from't I run on like a frighted dog with a bottle at's tail, that fain would bite it off and yet dares not look behind him' (5.1.161-4). Flaminio's affinity for and despising of Zanche leads him to conceptualise her in paradoxical terms: he cannot speak fondly of her without insulting her. For example, Flaminio first describes Zanche as both a 'chambermaid' and as an 'agent' of disruption (1.2.13-15). As I have previously discussed in Introduction, chambermaids in noble houses served the household's domestic needs: they were separate from those elite servants who served their mistress's corporeal and emotional needs. Flaminio's choice to label her a 'chambermaid' intentionally subverts Zanche's household status by associating her with a lower status position. This is just one instance where he cannot praise her without insulting her, and it is a statement we should not trust him to accurately discern. Zanche's actions and her relationship with her mistress rather indicate her elite position. Flaminio's complex articulation of the figure of the elite Black female servant allows for denigration as well as praise, alienation as well as intimacy, and a forced inferiority as well as a feared superiority; it speaks to a dismissal of binaries, positioning her within the liminalities of inclusion and exclusion. When Flaminio confesses, 'I do love that Moor, that witch, very constrainedly [...] I do love her just as a man holds a wolf by the ears', he cannot separate the romantic hold she has over him from the power of blackness and its further associations with evil

(5.1.155-58). Flaminio describes Zanche as both an object of desire and an agent of disruption. His feelings towards her are complicated: he wants to exclude her but is nevertheless compelled towards her. Recognising this contradictory attraction to and rejection of non-white characters – the ways in which they are figured in the plays as having a supposedly exotic yet at the same time dangerous allure – gives us context for understanding the complicated position elite black female servants found themselves in: both empowered by their status and yet disempowered by their perceived racial difference.

Models of kinship are challenged within the household as Flaminio and Zanche's interracial relationship is made visible. When Cordelia (Flaminio's mother) enters to witness Flaminio flirting with Zanche, she incites violence upon her household servant. Cordelia exclaims, 'Is this your perch, you haggard? Fly to th'stews. [*Strikes Zanche.*]' (5.1.191). Following Cordelia's beating, Marcello immediately kicks Zanche calling her 'a strumpet, / An impudent one' (5.1.195-6). Both Cordelia and Marcello justify their violence because of Zanche's sexuality. Lara Bovilsky notes that '[b]oth Zanche's desires and the violence directed at her are then racialized, demonstrating the importance of class structures to the development of institutionalized racism'.¹⁰¹ Building on Bovilsky's observation, I propose that it is Zanche's unmarried and elite servant status coupled with her blackness which incites concerns of race and sexual reproduction. Ania Loomba explains that '[s]exuality is central to the idea of 'race' understood as lineage, or as bloodline, because the idea of racial purity depends upon the strict control of lineage'.¹⁰² The understanding that sexual behaviour dictates bloodlines instigates fears of women's sexuality; in early modern drama, these anxieties are further exacerbated by the

¹⁰¹ Lara Bovilsky, 'Black Beauties, White Devils: The English Italian in Milton and Webster' in *ELH*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Fall, 2003), pp. 625-651, p. 645.

¹⁰² Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 32.

role of the elite Black female servant whose outsider status and skin colour challenges the preservation of the household's white virility. When Flaminio defends Zanche, asking, 'Why do you kick her?', Marcello responds, stating, 'She brags that you shall marry her' (5.1.196-9). Marriage between Flaminio and Zanche would upend hierarchies of alterity within the household. Akhimie suggests, 'the eligibility of marriage partners is usually confirmed by a regional, somatic, class-based similitude'.¹⁰³ If Zanche and Flaminio were to marry, she would turn from proximal kin into affinal kin, permanently bound to the household in which she currently occupies a temporary and subordinate place.

Marcello's rationalisation of violence speaks to more than just the interracial relationship between his brother and his sister's servant: if Zanche and Flaminio were to marry, their bond would racialise his family's lineage. Marcello expresses an anxiety of 'miscegenation' or 'comixture', what Sujata Iyengar explains to be the fear 'that sexual pollution or unhealthy mixing would occur if humans belonging to different races were to produce children together'.¹⁰⁴ Because the responsibility for the succession of internal and external markers of familial identity was placed on women, women were blamed for the corruption or tainting of a white bloodline. Early modern ideologies, based on the biblical story of Ham and Cush, interpreted black skin as a somatic marking of cursedness and infected blood.¹⁰⁵ Feerick explains that 'blood could be conceived of as a repository of sacred principles and properties, the locus of a family's virtue and social standing'.¹⁰⁶ In the early modern period, familial blood was indicative of nationhood,

¹⁰³ Akhimie, p. 71.

¹⁰⁴ Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Colour in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ For more on the story of Ham and Cush, see Dennis Austin Britton, 'Flesh and Blood: Race and Religion in *The Merchant of Venice*' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 108-122, specifically pp. 114, 121.

¹⁰⁶ Feerick, p. 14.

religion, skin colour, and social status. George Best, writing in the late 1500's, describes an instance of a Black man married to a white English woman with whom he had fathered a child: 'I my selfe have seene an Ethiopian as blacke as a cole brought into England, who taking a faire English woman to wife, begat a sonne in all respects as blacke as the father was, although England were his native countrey, and an English woman his mother'.¹⁰⁷ Notable in Best's discourse is a social attitude towards cross-racial marriages: as blood is racialised – representing the ways in which categories of difference are inherited – the responsibility for preserving a white, noble blood lineage and maintaining a seemingly “English” identity is placed on women.

In early modern drama, if miscegenation and degeneration occur, the transgressive woman is often at fault for denigrating and disrupting her familial lineage.¹⁰⁸ But in *The White Devil*, Zanche, the cultural outsider, has the ability to disrupt and infect Marcello's lineage. In early modern drama, playwrights yoke anxieties of blackness with anxieties of the unmarried female servant to construct her as the catalyst of household and social disorder: because she can alter a family's lineage, she is the ultimate threat to the unravelling of white, European identity. We see these anxieties play out throughout *The Knight of Malta*. In the final scene, after Mountferrat and Zanthia are banished, Nordine commands, 'Away French stallion, now you have a Barbary mare of your own, go leap her, and engender young devillings' (5.2.278-80). Noradine evokes racial miscegenation and bestiality, not unlike that which we see in *Othello*, to highlight the threat of Mountferrat and Zanthia's contamination of Maltese society which is the result of their transgressive behaviour. Jane Hwang Degenhardt notes that in this moment, '[a]gain, improper masculine behavior toward a Muslim woman is expressed in terms of undesirable

¹⁰⁷ As cited in Habib, *Black Lives*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁸ Although the term 'miscegenation' was not a term used until the nineteenth century, I employ it to discuss the concept of racial mixing.

reproductive consequences'.¹⁰⁹ By removing Zanthia and Mountferrat, Noradine expels their ability to contaminate white, European identity. Lucinda, on the other hand, the fair Turkish slave, although undeniably Muslim, is 'marked as appropriate for conversion'.¹¹⁰ Lucinda exhibits qualities of fairness and of chastity – she is described as possessing 'sweet beauty', 'native excellence', 'fair gifts', and for being a 'fair, and vertuous maid' (2.1. 162, 3.3.65, 3.3.74, 3.4.156). When Lucinda is first brought to Miranda, his infatuation and sexual desire cause him to risk his ascension to knighthood and his Christian conquest. As Degenhardt notes, '[t]he Knight of Malta relies on male sexual restraint to define a different model of Christian conquest'.¹¹¹ Miranda first tells Lucinda, 'I must lie with ye Lady', and then asserts that 'I would get a brave boy on thee, / A warlike boy' (3.4. 74, 90). When Lucinda expresses concern that their actions would result in 'ill Christians', Miranda defends his actions, stating 'We'l mend 'em in the breeding' (3.4.90-2).¹¹² In one way, Miranda's willingness to give up his chastity and promise to the Order positions Lucinda as the dangerous, Muslim temptress; and yet, her fairness, virtue, and beauty legitimise her as an object of sexual desire.¹¹³ Dadabhoy suggests that '[w]hile the erotic gaze and energies of Christian men can legitimately be directed at Lucinda [...] Abdella [Zanthia] is always, because of her blackness, beyond the economy of conversion and licit sexuality'.¹¹⁴ Although Lucinda and Zanthia are both Muslim and foreign

¹⁰⁹ Jane Hwang Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 183.

¹¹⁰ Dadabhoy, p. 252.

¹¹¹ Degenhardt, p. 179.

¹¹² Ania Loomba notes, Miranda also implies that 'the children of Muslim women can be blanched of their inner stain' through the 'penetrating seed of the Christian man' (p. 216). Ania Loomba, 'Delicious Traffick': Racial and Religious Difference on Early Modern Stages' in *Shakespeare and Race*, eds. Catherine Alexander and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 216. See also Degenhardt for a close reading of this scene in relation to Muslim sexuality and conversions (p. 179-181).

¹¹³ See Dadabhoy for a detailed account of Lucinda's white skin colour and how it masks her Ottoman heritage and Islamic religion (pp. 254-256).

¹¹⁴ Dadabhoy, p. 252.

strangers, it is ultimately Lucinda's fairness which marks her as not only appropriate for conversion, but also for entrance into Maltese society, and it is Zanthia's blackness which elicits social anxieties of contamination.

In *The White Devil*, Marcello's anxieties of a racialised bloodline coalesce with anxieties of the unmarried elite female servant, whose sexuality, race, and lower-status blood could infect a household's reputation and future lineage. As I discussed in Chapter Two, women are the vehicles through which a man's noble lineage continues. Zanche's relationship with Flaminio threatens the household in which she serves: their interracial marriage has the potential to disrupt and taint the preservation of noble whiteness, leading to degeneration.¹¹⁵ Hall astutely observes that '[a]ssociations between marriage, kinship, property, and economics become increasingly anxiety-ridden as traditional social structures (such as marriage) are extended when England develops commercial ties across the globe'.¹¹⁶ The ways in which the construction of Zanche's race mobilises anxieties of her position as both a household insider and cultural outsider draws attention to broader anxieties of kinship and of the unravelling of European identity that were present in early modern England. I suggest these anxieties are physically mapped on to Zanche's body as Marcello and Cordelia beat her.

Although Marcello and Cordelia believe Zanche will degenerate their supposedly pure, white, noble bloodline, it is ultimately their racism and violence towards Zanche which leads to the termination of the family's lineage. Following their beating, Zanche pursues Mulinassar,

¹¹⁵ Early modern household and conduct writers frequently warn against the sexual actions of female servants which could harm a household's reputation and stability; the transgressions of a racialized female servant supposedly pose further damage, as they would not only hurt a household's reputation but could also denigrate the familial blood lineage.

¹¹⁶ Kim F. Hall, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Colonization and Miscegenation in *The Merchant of Venice*' in *Renaissance Drama*, 1992, New Series, Vol. 23, *Renaissance Drama in an Age of Colonization* (1992), pp. 87-111, p. 88.

is Vittoria and Flaminio who bring about the other's deaths, thus concluding their familial lineage. In these plays, it is the visibility of the interracial relationship between a Black female servant and a socially superior white man which serves as the catalyst for household chaos, but it is ultimately the disorder from within – that is, between blood kin – which results in the termination of a family's blood lineage.

In the final scene of *The White Devil*, Webster probes the intricacies of the Black female servant's place in the early modern household. When Gasparo, Lodovico and Carlo enter to murder Flaminio and Vittoria on behalf of the Duke of Florence, Zanche is linked to her mistress and her lover. Lodovico tells Vittoria, 'Oh, thou hast been a most prodigious comet, / But I'll cut off your train. – Kill the Moor first' (5.6.214-5). Vittoria replies, 'You shall not kill her first. Behold my breast. / I will be waited on in death: my servant / Shall never go before me' (5.6.216-8). Like Katherine in *Henry VIII*, who insists that Patience wait on her in death, Vittoria too, demands that Zanche continue her service. However, unlike Katherine, Vittoria seeks to establish hierarchies of social order in death. Iman Sheeha suggests that 'Vittoria dies asserting her identity as a mistress, thus reinscribing herself in the social order that places her above Zanche even as it placed her husband above her'.¹¹⁷ However, when Carlo tells Zanche, 'Thou art my task, black fury', she replies, defending herself: 'I have blood / As red as either of theirs; wilt drink some ? [...] I am proud / Death cannot alter my complexion, / For I shall ne'er look pale' (5.6.227-31). Zanche's parting words draw attention to the distinctions and similarities between herself, Vittoria and Flaminio. If, as Patricia Crawford reminds us, '[b]lood was a central symbolic concept for the kinship structure of early modern England', then Zanche's claim links

¹¹⁷ Sheeha, 'Her Ladyship's Foolish', p. 188.

herself to the household via blood.¹¹⁸ She dismisses social constructions of her race which position her as inferior to construe her status as equal to her mistress and lover. Sheeha notes that in these final lines, Zanche ‘defies containment and refuses to be put in her place’.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, as Zanche praises her blackness in death, proud that she cannot outwardly show fear, she positions herself as superior to Flaminio and Vittoria, able to construct her own performative identity. Whipday suggests that it is in this moment Zanche accomplishes what neither Flaminio nor Vittoria can achieve: she can ‘claim control over the legibility of her complexion’.¹²⁰ Although, throughout the play, characters are intent on excluding Zanche because of her skin colour, she finds ways to couple herself to the household through blood and status. In the end, it is ultimately with death that Zanche achieves the power to reject social hierarchies of alterity and become equal to her mistress and lover.

This chapter seeks to add to the growing scholarship on race and service in early modern drama by examining Black female servants specifically within the context of elite female service. Throughout these plays, elite Black female servants perform a similar service to their white counterparts, yet it is the construction of their race and their skin colour which has set them apart. I propose that race complicates the status of the elite female servant, and the ways in which household and national identities were fashioned in the early modern period. Elite Black female servants are conceptualised as both slaves and servants, as household insiders and as cultural outsiders, and as markedly different from their white mistress because of their skin

¹¹⁸ Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2004, 2014), p. 2.

¹¹⁹ Sheeha, ‘Her Ladyship’s Foolish’, p. 188.

¹²⁰ Whipday, p. 52.

colour. As I have made clear, Rhodaghond's household identity is located within narratives of both elite female service and enslavement. It is ultimately how other characters identify her which affects her relationships and positionality within the household. The chaos Zanthia incites is made possible by her elite servant status, and yet it is shrouded in discourses of blackness, as her skin colour is linked to her immoral actions.

Discourses of colour intentionally differentiate the elite Black female servant from her white mistress, while simultaneously drawing attention to their similarities. It is within these discourses, I suggest, that hierarchies of alterity are intensified. The violence Zanche endures comes as a result of her intimate relationship with Vittoria and Flaminio, and the greater household's endeavor to separate themselves from her. It is her dual status as both a cultural outsider and a household insider which animates fundamental issues of inclusion and exclusion in the early modern household. In this chapter, I have argued that elite Black female servants problematise binaries that distinguish a servant from a slave, white from black, and kin from foreign strangers. Locating elite Black female servants within a wider economy of service, and recognising their elite status, encourages us to rethink how we understand the intersectionality of race, status, gender, and sexuality in the early modern world.

Chapter Four: ‘Let thy wife attend on her’: Service Without Servants in *Othello* and *The Winter’s Tale*

As Othello prepares to leave for Cyprus, he demands that Emilia should ‘attend on’ Desdemona (1.3.297).¹ This is an unusual request. As this thesis has shown, a married woman of Desdemona’s rank would, in accordance with normal social expectation, have a woman attend on her who is not only unmarried but also of relatively high social status.² Emilia, the wife of an untitled ensign, is neither. Henry J. Webb suggests that in early modern England, ‘[t]he ensign has no command’.³ Unlike Desdemona’s, Emilia’s husband is not a noble military officer and therefore does not hold a high social status.⁴ This new assignment not only requires Emilia to adopt a role unfamiliar to her; it is also, counterintuitively for modern readers and audiences, a role that is *above* her social standing. Moreover, it forces her into a position of household conflict. Suddenly rendering her subordinate both to Iago as his wife and to Desdemona and Othello as their servant, this appointment elicits confusion. Where does her loyalty most properly lie? When her mistress is asked in the council scene, ‘Do you perceive [...] / Where most you

¹ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, The Arden Third Series, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann, intro. Ayanna Thompson (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2016). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the play will be taken from this edition.

² Shakespeare’s use of ‘attend on’ is peculiar in that it suggests that Emilia occupies an ambiguous, non-specific household position. Within the early modern household, the term ‘servant’ seemed to designate one who held a specific household position associated with their social status. Furthermore, the etymology of ‘servant’ and ‘attendant’ are intertwined. An attendant is one who ‘waits upon’ another, whereas the title ‘servant’ describes ‘one under obligation to work for (and obey) another’. There does not seem to be a clear difference between these two terms in early modern drama, although scholars have not attended to this line of inquiry. Shakespeare’s use of ‘attend’ in this instance may suggest that Othello wants Emilia to perform a kind of service for Desdemona without assigning her a specific role. Perhaps, because she is a wife, he could not assign her a particular title. On the other hand, he may have so decided to announce that Emilia will ‘attend on’ Desdemona because the scansion using ‘serve’ would create an irregular line. See *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. T.F. Hoad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), ‘attendant’, ‘servant’.

³ Henry J. Webb, *Elizabethan Military Sciences: The Books and Practices* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 58.

⁴ High-ranking Englishmen, Webb observes, easily made a name for themselves and gained a military title (p. 58). A man like Iago, stalled at the rank of ensign, would not have a high social status, but a man like Cassio, educated and elite, would. Iago’s social status as an ensign dictates Emilia’s status.

owe obedience?', she replies 'I do perceive here a divided duty' (1.3.178-80). Emilia too, from the moment Othello orders her to 'attend on' Desdemona, has 'a divided duty'.⁵

My interest in Emilia in this chapter is two-fold. Firstly, she does not fit the mold of an elite female servant that this thesis has so far presented. In the Introduction, I discussed how there is greater potential for dramatic tension in the figure of the unmarried elite female servant, who is susceptible to male sexual aggression and whose unfixed position complicates her progression through the service period. However, in *Othello*, Shakespeare creates conflict through Emilia's dual role as both Desdemona's attendant and as Iago's wife. It is my understanding that elite married women in early modern England only re-entered service in special circumstances, when they were specifically requested by a queen or socially superior lady. The service these elite, married women performed was both similar and unlike their unmarried counterparts, in that, although they cared for their mistress's corporeal body and emotional needs, they were not in service for a wifely education and were rewarded with a salary.⁶ Emilia's assignment as Desdemona's attendant would suggest to the audience a break with normality, one presumably enforced by the exigencies of wartime and one which Othello, not Desdemona, requests. However, as this chapter will clarify, Emilia is not an elite married woman re-entering service, but rather a lower status ensign's wife adopting a role which is above her social standing. It is the combination of her marital status and lower social status which I propose obstructs her from performing good service. Her conflicting household position leads

⁵ James Schiffer observes that 'the divided duty' Desdemona feels towards her father and husband is also seen in Emilia, who is torn in her desire to please her husband and her loyalty towards her mistress. However, this has not been looked at within a greater service context. See 'Othello Among the Sonnets' in *Othello: New Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Kolin (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 325-345, p. 327.

⁶ For more on the salary and expectations of married women in the queen's service, see Helen Payne, *Aristocratic Women and the Jacobean Court: 1603-1625* (Royal Holloway and Bedford New College: unpublished PhD, 2001), pp. 146-152.

her to unquestioningly fulfil her husband's desires, such as stealing Desdemona's prized handkerchief, while simultaneously trying to loyally serve Desdemona as her attendant, by offering counsel and acting as a companion. Critics have acknowledged Emilia's predicament, as both wife and servant, yet they have not understood how her lower social status and conflicting position within Othello's household complicate her performance of service.⁷ I suggest that Emilia's low social status directly influences her actions throughout the course of the play.

Furthermore, I propose that Iago's suspicion of Emilia's adultery with Othello – which he first admits in act one scene three, 'I hate the Moor / And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets / He's done my office', and later in act two scene one, 'For that I do suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat [...] And nothing can or shall content my soul / Till I am evened with him, wife for wife' – shapes her actions and elicits her silence as she seeks to preserve her own reputation by performing dutiful obedience to her husband (1.3.385-7, 2.1.293-7). As I will later discuss, the charge of slander against a wife is an immutable mark on a woman's reputation. Emilia, aware of Iago's suspicions – 'some such squire was he / That turned your wit the seamy side without / And made you to suspect me with the Moor' (4.2.147-9) – seeks to redeem herself before his accusations are made public. Like Desdemona, Emilia must grapple with her husband's jealousy and fantastical cuckoldry suspicions to remain a dutiful wife. Her ability to

⁷ In a recent article, Jeremy Lopez reads 'everything Emilia says or does not say' as being framed by her service relationship solely with Desdemona (p. 178). He understands Emilia to be only Desdemona's servant but notably rejects the possibility 'that the two women share, or come to share, an affective bond that constitutes a form of resistance to the homosocial (and, indeed, the social) tensions that drive this violent tragedy so explicitly concerned with the 'curse of service' (p. 167). See Jeremy Lopez, 'Desdemona's Honest Friend' in *Shakespeare Survey* 75: *Othello*, ed. Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 166-179. For notable and enduring feminist readings of Emilia's character, see Carol Thomas Neely, 'Women and Men in Othello: 'what should such a fool / Do with so Good a Woman?' in *Shakespeare Studies* 10, (1977), pp. 133-158; Eamen Grennan, 'The Women's Voices in Othello: Speech, Song, Silence' in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (1987), pp. 275-92; Gayle Greene, 'This That You Call Love: Sexual and Social Tragedy in Othello', in *Journal of Women's Studies in Literature* 1 (1979), pp. 16-32.

perform the role of an elite female servant well is compromised by her position as a married woman.

Secondly, I contend that it is through the figure of Emilia that the play reasserts the social need for set hierarchies within a household to maintain an ordered society. Othello's household is made chaotic by fluid social positions, and in particular I suggest that it is Emilia's divided duty as both wife and servant which conflicts with idealised notions of social organisation. In early modern England, designated hierarchies meant that each person knew their social place and to whom their obedience and duties lay.⁸ William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) depicts the household hierarchy in three orders: 'husbands, wives', 'parents, children', and 'masters, servants'.⁹ Gouge comments on the overlap of positions where a person could be the superior in one order and subordinate in another; for example, a woman could be both subordinate to her husband, as well as mistress to her servants. However, these orders did not overlap; it would have been very rare for a woman both to be a wife and thus subordinate to her husband, and also be a servant and thus subordinate to her master or mistress within the same household. But this is Emilia's ill-fated position, one which critics have not yet recognised. Her assignment as Desdemona's attendant is, I propose, an important element of the disorder that ultimately envelops Othello's household.

Othello, as it happens, is not Shakespeare's only play in which a wife adopts multiple roles – roles which place social status at odds with marital and household hierarchies – in order to perform acts of service. In this chapter, I also analyse *The Winter's Tale* (1610), in which Paulina, a lady and wife to the courtier Antigonus, presents herself first as Hermione's advocate,

⁸ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), C1r.

⁹ Gouge, C1r.

arguing in her defence against the king, then as a midwife, delivering news of Hermione's birth, and finally she adopts three roles as Leontes's 'loyal servant', 'physician', and 'most obedient counsellor', as she seeks to restore order (2.3.52-7).¹⁰ The parallels between Emilia's position and that of Paulina, comparisons which might not appear obvious at first sight due to the difference in social status between these two characters, become intriguingly apparent on closer inspection. Both women perform acts of service for a slandered woman. Yet, whereas Emilia is assigned to be Desdemona's attendant, Paulina offers to act as Hermione's advocate, a very different role in key aspects but nevertheless a version of service in its own way. Paulina's elite status as a lady and courtier, in other words, permits her to perform extreme acts of service on her own accord which ultimately determines the play's outcome, whereas Emilia's low status as an untitled ensign's wife hinders her from asserting authority and thus redeeming the dramatic situation.¹¹ Emilia is assigned the role of an elite female servant, but is not elite and is also married; Paulina is, conversely, elite and married, and yet performs acts of service without being a servant.

Furthermore, both women pose a threat to male authority as their fight for justice supersedes gendered and social hierarchies. Both Paulina and Emilia defy their husband's and the state's orders, resolute on achieving justice for the slandered woman. Following Paulina's arrival in act two scene three, Leontes asks Antigonus, 'What, canst not rule her?' to which Paulina preempts his answer: 'From all dishonesty he can; in this – / Unless he take the course that you have done, / Commit me for committing honour – trust it, / He shall not rule me'

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, The Arden Third Series, ed. John Pitcher (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2010). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the play will be taken from this edition.

¹¹ As a lady and wife of a courtier, Paulina holds more status and authority than any of the queen's women would. For more on the social status of an ensign, see Paul Jorgensen's *Shakespeare's Military World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).

(2.3.45-49). Paulina's dedication to Hermione, first as her advocate and then as her preserver for sixteen years, challenges not only Leontes's rule but also her husband's authority. Moreover, as the plot evolves, Paulina's dual role as Hermione's guardian and as Leontes's advisor grants her *de facto* control over the head of state, subjecting Leontes's authority to her critique. *Othello*, too, draws attention to the extent to which male authority can be undermined by female agency. In the final scene, although hindered by her subordinate position, Emilia disregards the social and gendered hierarchies which place her, as a woman, wife, and servant, at the bottom of the social ladder so as to champion Desdemona's innocence. She not only undermines Othello's social and gendered superiority to emphasise his racial inferiority, 'O gull, O dolt, / As ignorant as dirt!', thus renouncing his authority as she turns insults of blackness on to her master, she also defies her husband's demands – 'Go to, charm your tongue', 'I charge you, get you home' – superseding his authority as she pleads with the gentlemen of the state: 'Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak. 'Tis proper I obey him – but not now' (5.2.159-60, 179, 191-3). Although both women successfully rescind social orders which enforce female inferiority to champion the slandered woman's innocence, neither is allowed to maintain such authority: Emilia is murdered, and Paulina married off to Camillo. Both plays conclude by abruptly removing authority from the women in order to restore patriarchal order. To a great extent these plays are about men and the disorder created by their errors in judgment, but they are also about the ways in which women's agency in the period is ultimately coupled with hierarchies of order that necessitate their subjugation.

In this chapter I perform close textual examinations, first of *Othello* and then of *The Winter's Tale*, to demonstrate the effect considerations of social status – and specifically the social status of female service – can have on our understanding of two of Shakespeare's most

popular yet rarely compared female characters. In doing so, I suggest that drawing connections between these two plays solely by way of the male protagonists' tendency to jealousy, as criticism has done for so long, is to limit our understanding of what they share. Beginning with *Othello*, I first address Shakespeare's deviations from his source material, Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, which transforms Emilia from a wife and passive storyteller into a servant and active participant in the narrative. Shakespeare's inclusion of Emilia in the play as a 'non-elite' servant to multiple masters complicates the actions she takes and enhances the plot. I then investigate how Emilia's endeavour to enact good and loyal service, first as a wife to Iago and then as a servant to Desdemona, is shaped by her social status. Her failure to fulfil this intention occurs, I argue, because of her conflicting position within Othello's household. In this section, I reference twenty-first-century London-based performances not only to draw attention to how costuming and gesture serve as markers for understanding social positions, but also to highlight the ways in which Emilia's status has been misinterpreted. Reading Emilia from the perspective of social status can transform and alter both our reading of female service across early modern drama and our response to the events of *Othello*.

I then turn to *The Winter's Tale* to analyse how it is precisely because Paulina is *not* contracted in a form of service, as is Emilia, that she can perform such extraordinary acts of service. Although critics frequently treat Paulina as if she were a servant, I suggest that she is, rather, an elite woman whose status enables her to voluntarily enact service without identifying as a servant: her actions alone do not determine her identity.¹² However, like Emilia, Paulina

¹² Various literary scholars of service that I mention in the Introduction have positioned Paulina as a servant. Evett describes her as 'a faithfully disobedient servant' (p. 126); Weil comments, 'Camillo and Paulina, the good servants' (p. 76); Schalkywk notes, 'Yet nowhere is Shakespeare's distinctive concept of service as apparent as in Paulina [...] critical servant and advisor to Leontes' (p. 263). Although these critics do not dismiss her various roles, they do not consider how her actions add to rather than define her identity.

assumes a problematic social position following the loss of her husband: without confirmation of his death, she is forced to occupy a liminal state between wife and widow. I contend that this unsettled position (one that is the product of Leontes's jealous actions) is what allows her such control over the king. It is not until she claims widowhood in the final act that Leontes revokes her authority by marrying her off to Camillo, thus forcing her to return to a subordinate role under her new husband's control. Unlike the elite female servants explored in the previous three chapters, Paulina and Emilia are anomalous characters who undeniably enact a form of female service similar to that of their elite, unmarried counterparts, but are notably not bound to the institution of service. In this final chapter, I will demonstrate how reimagining these popular characters through the perspective of both social status and service can alter our understanding of their position within the narrative.

Conflicting Marital and Social Status in *Othello*

Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* tells the story of the 'noble character of Disdemona' who fell in love with the 'Moor of Venice'.¹³ She leaves her family to marry him and embarks on a journey to Cyprus with her new husband. The Ensign, 'a man of handsome figure, but of the most depraved nature in the world' has also brought his wife to Cyprus, 'a young, and fair, and virtuous lady; and being of Italian birth she was much loved by Disdemona'.¹⁴ Shakespeare, for the most part, adheres to Cinthio's dramatic structure, yet his crucial deviations from the source material in his creation of Emilia transform her from a virtuous lady and friend into a servant, thus denigrating her social position. Whereas in Cinthio's narrative, the Ensign's wife plays a passive role, Shakespeare's inclusion of her as a servant in Othello's household turns her into an active

¹³ Giraldi Cinthio, *Hecatommithi* III,7, trans. J.E. Taylor (Ontario: Publications Medieval Italian Series, 2000), <https://www.yorku.ca/inpar/cinthio_moor_taylor.pdf> [Accessed 12.12.2020]. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Cinthio's text come from this edition.

¹⁴ Cinthio, p. 3.

participant in the play's disorder. Iago's character clearly resembles the Ensign – 'an evil-minded' villain – one whose social stagnation justifies his corruption.¹⁵ However, in Cinthio's narrative, the Ensign is secretly in love with Desdemona and he fears that her love for the Captain (Cassio in Shakespeare's tale) is ultimately to blame for his lack of success and mobility. This misery causes him to devise a plan to turn the 'Moor' against his wife. Although it is a subtle differentiation, in Cinthio's tale it is the Ensign who has adulterous intentions, whereas in Shakespeare's text, Iago blames his wife for her imagined adulterous actions; it is this fantastical jealousy coupled with his dissatisfaction with Cassio's promotion which prompts Iago's plot against Othello. In Cinthio's narrative, it is noted how '[t]he Ensign's wife, who knew the whole truth (her husband wishing to make use of her to compass the death of Desdemona), but could never consent to such a project, dared not, from fear of her husband, disclose a single circumstance'.¹⁶ Unlike Emilia, the Ensign's wife is privy to her husband's plotting, but, like her counterpart, she, too, fears her husband's reaction to her potential disloyalty. After the 'Moor' and Ensign murder Desdemona as she sleeps and the truth emerges, the villagers murder the 'Moor', and the Ensign, tortured in prison, dies at home. The tale ends noting that '[t]hus did Heaven avenge the innocence of Desdemona; and all these events were narrated by the Ensign's wife, who was privy to the whole, after his death'.¹⁷ In Cinthio's tale, it is not the Ensign's wife who avenges Desdemona's innocence; rather, she remains silent until the men are dead and only then is she free to divulge the actions that took place. Emilia, on the other hand, speaks out against her husband and her master to champion her mistress's innocence but, as a result, is ultimately murdered.

¹⁵ Cinthio, p. 6.

¹⁶ Cinthio, p. 8.

¹⁷ Cinthio, p. 11.

As Shakespeare transforms Emilia from a passive storyteller into an active participant, he inserts her into the narrative in an opposing role as both wife and servant, which, as I will explore, elicits a deadly confusion when it comes to establishing whom the subordinate should rightly serve and with whom their loyalty lies. Before I examine this conflicting role as both wife and servant, it is important to note that although Shakespeare gives Emilia a voice, creating an active, strong-willed character, he seems to deliberately lower her status by highlighting Iago's stalled career in the new military order. In the late sixteenth century, military practice underwent a significant transformation in tactics towards employing arithmetic – what we would call 'calculation' – as the basis of a modern military strategy.¹⁸ This military transition placed educated theorists at the top tier of the military hierarchy, disregarding the experience of professional soldiers. With this transition to a more calculated strategy came a shift in the classification of rank. Rather than promoting soldiers, such as Iago, who had devoted their lives to the martial profession, educated men of higher social status who studied the art of war – a role embodied in the play by Cassio – would be preferred for positions of power.¹⁹ As the role of lieutenant transformed in the late sixteenth century, the importance of arithmetic increased, thus providing further opportunities for those with access to education. Like the elite woman whose social status provides her with the required education in arithmetic and literacy expected of an elite female servant, an educated man had more opportunities to rise in the military. Education, and therefore, social status, became a factor in determining rank and promotions. Iago's central complaint that Cassio has usurped a promotion intended for him relates directly to Cassio's

¹⁸ See Paul Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).

¹⁹ In *Othello*, Shakespeare assigns Cassio to the role of lieutenant, where the familiar relationship between lieutenant and ensign was one of tension (see Jorgensen, p. 103-5).

education and social status.²⁰ In the very first scene, Iago criticises Cassio as ‘a great arithmetician [...] That never set a squadron in the field’, whose experience as a soldier is ‘mere prattle without practice’ (1.1.17-25). Iago, who dismisses these new military practices, claims to believe that experience should dictate promotions. Whereas an ensign remained the standard-bearer and emblem of the company, a lieutenant with an education in military theory would, it was held, provide tactical strategies that someone with a purely martial background could not and was therefore much more likely to advance through the ranks of the military. Iago is thus stalled at the rank of ensign unless he relinquishes his traditional ideas and adopts scientific theories of war. Because a husband’s social position determined that of his wife, Iago’s stagnated military status as an untitled military officer directly affects Emilia’s social standing.

Although the clash in status between Iago and Cassio has been acknowledged in scholarship and performance, Emilia’s low status has, for the most part, been ignored or misinterpreted. In Iqbal Khan’s 2015 RSC production of *Othello*, which notably cast a Black Othello and Iago (played by Hugh Quarshie and Lucian Msamati), both Desdemona and Emilia (played by Ayesha Dharker) are costumed as elite women with no noticeable difference in status between the two. Similarly, in the Shakespeare’s Globe 2018 production of *Othello*, which intentionally cast the play’s three main relationships as interracial, Emilia (played by Sheila Atim), is costumed in an exquisite gold jumpsuit, appearing as quite the contrast to Iago’s drab

²⁰ Interestingly, Shakespeare employs the semiotics and associations of lieutenant and ensign to illuminate the character flaws of both Cassio and Iago. Popular early modern military writings underscore the importance of a lieutenant’s reputation and an ensign’s honesty. Cassio’s failings as an officer are more than simply his drunkenness; they go against the essence of his office. Shakespeare employs the familiar characteristics of a lieutenant and turns them against Cassio while accentuating the importance of an ensign’s honesty through Iago’s manipulation. For more on specific military positions, see Leonard Digges, *An Arithmeticall militare Treatise, Named Stratonticos*, (London, 1590); William Garrard, *The Art of Warre* (London, 1591); Henry J. Webb, ‘The Military Background in *Othello*’ in *Philological Quarterly* 30 (1951); Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Othello: A Contextual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

military uniform. Her status literally shines through her costuming as she appears as Desdemona's glittering entourage.²¹ Most recently, on the other hand, the 2022-2023 National Theatre production depicts Emilia (played by Tanya Franks) as not only an older matronly servant to Desdemona, but also as a wife suffering from domestic abuse, covered in blood and bruises. Although the National's production marks a difference between the young and radical Desdemona, and the older, battered Emilia, it is not their shared social status but the similarities of their marital situations which the play emphasises. Different as they are, these recent, twenty-first century productions project Emilia as an appropriate attendant for Desdemona; what they miss is the fact that she is not a suitable choice. I suggest that because social positions were presented through clothing in early modern England, an audience in the seventeenth century would be far more attuned to the nuances and coupling of costuming and social status than we are today.²² By costuming Emilia as an elite woman, these modern productions misinterpret her social position, ignoring the ways in which her conflicted status affects her performance of service throughout the narrative. The tragedy of the play, I argue, in many ways hinges on Emilia's unusual position within Othello's household.

First and foremost, as Iago's wife, Emilia is expected to perform dutiful service to her husband. Dod and Cleaver's *A godly form of household government* (1598) states that wives must 'submit themselves and be obedient unto their husbands, as to the Lord, because the husband is by God's ordinance the wife's head'.²³ In Matthew Griffith's *Bethel, or a form for*

²¹ Both the RSC's and Globe's productions give great attention to race in the play, and notably cast an actor of colour as Emilia. For a comprehensive history on the racial casting of Emilia and Iago in *Othello* in the late-twentieth and early-twenty first century, see Angela Pao, 'Ocular Revisions: Re-casting *Othello* in Text and Performance', in *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 27-45.

²² See the Introduction for further detail on how an early modern English audience would be acutely sensitive to specific service titles and costuming because of sumptuary laws.

²³ John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A godly form of household government* (1598), O7r.

families (1634), he notes that ‘though wives must obey and serve, yet it is not in the nature of bond-servants’.²⁴ Early modern literature frequently describes wives as being in service to their husbands: this is merely a way to designate and articulate male superiority in a marriage. What is most important is that a wife’s submission signalled her husband’s authority. In *Othello*, we are first introduced to Emilia by way of her husband. Before Emilia appears on stage, Iago admits his suspicions of her infidelity with Othello; in acknowledging these suspicions, he also confesses a lack of control over his wife. Emma Whipday’s reading of early modern household literature and religious homilies observes that ‘[t]he speech of women in the public (and religious) sphere is described as ‘disorder’ [...] For the wife to step outside such boundaries [of the home] is an act of disorder: it is also an act of usurpation’.²⁵ Iago’s accusation suggests that Emilia has not only stepped ‘out o’ doors’, thus making her body visible to the public and creating disorder in his household as an unruly wife, but also that she has usurped his superior and authoritative place. From their first scene together, Iago oversees Emilia’s movement and actions, and serves as a constant reminder of her subordinate position. As Cassio greets Iago and Emilia, he remarks, ‘Let it not gall your patience, good Iago, / That I extend my manners; ’tis my breeding / That gives me this bold show of courtesy. [*He kisses Emilia*]’ (2.1.97-99). Before she even speaks, Emilia is forced to publicly kiss a man who is not her husband in front of her husband. This does not bode well for her. As Cassio does so, Iago remarks, ‘Sir, would she give you so much of her lips / As of her tongue she oft bestows on me / You’d have enough’ (2.1.100-103). Iago hints that his wife’s loose tongue reflects a sexual voracity; unable to defend herself

²⁴ As quoted in Kate Aughterson’s *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 156.

²⁵ Emma Whipday, *Shakespeare’s Domestic Tragedies: Violence in the Early Modern Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 37.

against his snide comments, Emilia remains silent.²⁶ It is Desdemona who exclaims, ‘Alas! She has no speech’, interpreting her silence to be embarrassment rather than her wifely duty (2.1.100). Katherine R. Larson suggests that ‘the most extreme form of feminine conversational self-control is usually represented as silence, the sealed mouth ostensibly mirroring the successfully sealed genitalia’.²⁷ If silence is the emblem of chastity, female speech is an open defiance of patriarchal control. Emilia, seeking to represent the obedient, chaste wife, remains silent in the face of Iago’s continual abuse. He then proceeds to describe wives in general (but pointedly his wife) as follows:

...you are pictures out of doors,
Bells in your parlours, wild-cats in your kitchens,
Saints in your injuries, devils being offended,
Players in your housewifery, and housewives in
Your beds!

(2.1.109-113)

Interestingly, it is Desdemona who responds, defending Emilia: ‘O, fie upon thee, slanderer!’ (2.1.113). In doing so, she completes what Pamela Allen Brown describes as ‘performances and shaming tactics used to combat slander and sexual assaults against women’.²⁸

I propose that Iago’s initial accusation and its potential to stain Emilia’s reputation affects her behaviour throughout the course of the play as she seeks to redeem herself and prove her fidelity. We know that Emilia is aware of these accusations as she later confronts her husband, stating: ‘some such squire was he / That turned your wit the seamy side without / And made you

²⁶ E.A.J. Honigmann’s footnote suggests ‘Iago coarsely hints at kissing, as well as scolding, with the tongue’ (p. 172).

²⁷ Katherine R. Larson, *Early Modern Women in Conversation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 32.

²⁸ Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 9.

to suspect me with the Moor' (4.2.147-9). Lisa Jardine's enduring argument, that in *Othello* all three women (Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca) are:

wrongfully accused of sexual misdemeanour 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 [...] they yield the identical slur, the identical charge of sexual promiscuity – the most readily available form of assault on a woman's reputation.²⁹

This charge of slander, which Desdemona later describes as her own 'wretched fortune', is indelible (4.2.129). As I discussed in Chapter Three, Patricia Akhimie's work on the intersection of race and social status highlights how blackness and stigmatised somatic markers serve to evaluate worth and circumscribe agency.³⁰ She observes that '[b]lackness as a mark symbolizes that immutable status in which no behaviour, good or bad, can alter one's reputation'.³¹ The potential to stain a woman's reputation is therefore a form of social oppression, one which once darkened cannot be altered. It is this immutable status with which Iago threatens Emilia so that she complies as his wife. Cyndia Susan Clegg suggests that '[s]exual slander, both insidious and venomous, destroys the credibility essential for a woman to defend herself'.³² However, as Jardine notes, the slander of a woman's reputation only occurs when a defamatory accusation is spoken in public.³³ I suggest that because Iago has not publicly ruined Emilia's name, she seeks to alter her reputation before the threat can be made public. She composes herself so she may present as a chaste, silent, and obedient wife. Nevertheless, in the couple's first scene, Iago all but tarnishes her reputation. With his final insult mentioned above, that wives are '[p]layers in

²⁹ Lisa Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 25.

³⁰ Patricia Akhimie, *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), p. 17.

³¹ Akhimie, p. 53.

³² Cyndia Susan Clegg, 'Truth, Lies and the Law of Slander in *Much Ado about Nothing*' in *The Law in Shakespeare*, eds. Constance Jordan and Karen Cunningham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 167-188, p. 176.

³³ For more on defamation in *Othello*, see Jardine 'Why should he call her whore?' in *Reading Shakespeare*, pp. 19-34.

your housewifery, and housewives in / Your beds!', he jointly alludes to Emilia's disorderly conduct, as one that plays the role of the housewife, without giving serious attention to her work, and to her sexual misconduct. Sarah Lewis notes that '[a]s is so often the case, a term used to define a woman's authority is also used as a pejorative'.³⁴ The *OED* defines a housewife as both 'a woman whose main occupation is managing the general running of a household' and as 'a frivolous, impertinent, or disreputable woman or girl; a hussy'.³⁵ Iago's final, backhanded insult couples Emilia's subordinate position with her sexual promiscuity as a form of subjugation, rendering her silent for most of the remaining scene. In this moment, Emilia performs the role of abused wife, yet as both wife and elite female servant, Emilia is forced to choose between loyal service to her husband and to her mistress.

Emilia's resolution to perform loyal and obedient service to her husband is ultimately cemented in the handkerchief scene. The question as to why Emilia gives Iago Desdemona's handkerchief and then later remains silent as both Desdemona and Othello query its whereabouts, can be explained, I argue, by Emilia's conflicting position within Othello's household. When Desdemona drops her handkerchief in act three scene three, leaving Emilia alone with her mistress's prized gift, Emilia remarks:

I am glad I have found this napkin,
This was her first remembrance from the Moor.
My wayward husband hath a hundred times
Woody me to steal it, but she so loves the token
– For he conjured her she should ever keep it –
That she reserves it evermore about her
To kiss and talk to. I'll have the work ta'en out
And give't Iago: what he will do with it
Heaven knows, not I,

³⁴ Sarah Lewis, *Time and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 54.

³⁵ 'housewife, n. 1, n. 2', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press < www.oed.com/view/Entry/88947 > [Accessed 12.12.2020].

I nothing, but to please his fantasy.
(3.3.294-303)

In acknowledging that Iago has 'wooded' her to 'steal' Desdemona's cherished love token, Emilia recognises her conflicting loyalty to both her husband and mistress. The handkerchief illuminates how Emilia cannot perform loyal service as both a wife and attendant. Critics have not understood how early modern household orders, which are set out to ensure clear hierarchies of obedience, are upset as Emilia is left to choose with whom her loyalty lies. Emilia's predicament becomes clear: she must either return the handkerchief to her mistress and disappoint her husband or give it to her husband and risk whatever repercussions may come from her mistress. Ironically, the latter appears, at first glance, to be the least threatening option. As she makes her decision, 'I'll have the work ta'en out / And give't Iago', the scansion of the text indicates that Emilia second-guesses her choice. Questioning what Iago will do with the handkerchief gives her pause: 'Heaven knows, not I'. The line is missing five beats. Jeremy Lopez suggests that in this scene, 'Emilia is more resistant than complicit with her husband'.³⁶ Although the scansion of this passage may indicate some resistance towards her husband, I propose that in this silent moment, Emilia makes her decision to remain loyal to Iago. What follows, however, is an ambiguous statement: 'I nothing, but to please his fantasy'. Emilia suggests that either she knows nothing of his intentions and, in giving him the handkerchief, only aims to please his desires, or that, as his wife, she is 'nothing' – that is, she is of no value – except to please her husband's fantasies. Although the latter reading is far more depressing, it is in line with her reaction to Iago's suspicions and is therefore, I suggest, the most likely.

³⁶ Lopez, p. 171.

Much has been made of the origins and implications of the handkerchief, but I suggest its representation of loyalty in marriage holds significance for Desdemona and Othello's marriage, *and* for Emilia and Iago's.³⁷ Christina Alfar Leon similarly argues that '[t]he napkin, then, takes on symbolic capital for both women, guaranteeing both of their loyalties to both of their husbands'.³⁸ Although I do not disagree with Alfar's analysis of the women's loyalty and the ways in which Desdemona's need to keep the handkerchief 'comes into direct competition with Emilia's need to steal it', my focus is more on how the handkerchief symbolises Emilia's decision to perform loyal service to her husband rather than to her mistress.³⁹ I propose that it is through the handkerchief that Emilia is offered an opportunity to redeem her reputation and prove her loyalty to Iago. When Iago enters and she informs him, 'I have a thing for you'; he interrupts her, again alluding to her sexuality – 'You have a thing for me? It is a common thing' – suggesting that she, as his property, is common and thus 'free to be used by everyone' (3.3.306).⁴⁰ Emilia does not stand up to his insinuation, but rather shifts his attention towards the object at hand: 'What will you give me now / For that same handkerchief?' (3.3.308-9). Whipday

³⁷ Lynda E. Boose argues that the handkerchief is a signifier of Desdemona's chastity. I draw upon her argument to suggest that it signifies both Desdemona's and Emilia's chastity in marriage. See Lynda E. Boose, 'Othello's Handkerchief: "The recognizance and pledge of love"' in *ELR* 5 (1975), pp. 360–374. For more on the significance of the handkerchief, see Ian Smith's 'Othello's Black Handkerchief'. Smith first proposes that in the early modern period, theatrical techniques would 'imitate the black skin of Moors or Africans on the stage' by 'covering the actor's body with black cloth, its function being to materialize the imagined black bodies of real Africans existing in the world outside the theatre' (p. 4). He then goes on to argue that given Othello's detailed narration of the handkerchief and its relationship to his identity, it is likely that the handkerchief would have been black rather than white. Scholars have traditionally assumed the handkerchief to be white, and to be representative of Desdemona; Smith argues against this, insisting rather that the handkerchief is a metonym for Othello himself. Farah Karim-Cooper develops Smith's analysis as she questions whether it was likely that 'actors on the Jacobean stage would have worn black masks or textiles instead of face paint'. Rather, she suggests that 'what actors used to signal racial identities, whether it was black cloth or paint, depended on the theatrical conditions, perhaps even the genre and certainly the emotional stakes within the play' (p. 27). See Ian Smith, 'Othello's Black Handkerchief' in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Spring 2013), pp. 1-25, p. 4; Farah Karim-Cooper, 'The Materials of Race: Staging the Black and White Binary in Early Modern Theatre' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 17-29, p. 27.

³⁸ Christina Leon Alfar, *Women and Shakespeare's Cuckoldry Plays: Shifting Narratives of Marital Betrayal* (New York, London: Routledge, 2017), p. 151.

³⁹ Alfar, p. 151.

⁴⁰ See Honigmann's gloss of 'common', p. 232.

suggests that the handkerchief symbolises Desdemona's constancy to Othello, and that its circulation then serves 'as both symbol and proof of the extent to which Desdemona's body has been held in common'.⁴¹ The reverse can be said for Emilia's circulation of the handkerchief: her gifting of it serves as a symbol and proof of her fidelity.⁴²

Upon realising his wife has performed her duty to him, Iago commands, 'A good wench, give it me', to which Emilia replies 'What will you do with't, that you have been so earnest / To have me filch it?' (3.3.317-19). We have no reason to doubt that Emilia does indeed give Iago the handkerchief following his request, even as she questions his intentions. Yet editions and performances often add a moment of business as a way to comment on Emilia and Iago's relationship. In the Globe's 2007 production, Emilia teases Iago with the handkerchief and he, in turn, snatches it right out of her hand. This business insinuates that she did not willingly give the handkerchief to her husband and that her loyalty rather remains with her mistress.⁴³ However, this gesture is misleading: if the handkerchief itself symbolises Emilia's loyalty and fidelity to her husband, then the giving of it to Iago suggests an alliance of loyalty with him. Parallels can be drawn between the two marriages, of course, one of which being both of the husbands' fantastical assumption of his wife's infidelity and the wife's acute need to prove her loyalty and chastity, and it is through the object of the handkerchief and its circulation that, I suggest, both women seek to redeem their reputations.

⁴¹ Whipday, p. 146.

⁴² For scholarship on the temporal and polychronic nature of the handkerchief in *Othello*, see Chapter Six in Jonathan Gil Harris's *Untimely Matters*.

⁴³ The Arden 3 edition includes this stage direction, noting 'some Iago's snatch the handkerchief, others get it by coaxing' (p. 233). However, neither quarto edition nor the folio includes a stage direction to suggest that Emilia does not immediately give her husband the handkerchief.

Although Emilia enacts loyal service to her husband, it is her concurrent desire to perform obedient service to her mistress that elicits conflict leading to the demise of both women. Throughout the first half of the play, Emilia enacts dutiful service to Desdemona, waiting on her mistress or acting as her messenger to Cassio. Upon giving Iago Desdemona's handkerchief, Emilia's alliance shifts. In the following scene, once the two women have been left alone, Desdemona immediately asks, 'Where should I lose that handkerchief, Emilia?', to which she replies with a lie, 'I know not, madam' (3.4.23-4). Desdemona proceeds to justify that Othello 'is of true mind, and made of no such baseness / As jealous creatures are', prompting Emilia to ask, 'Is he not jealous?' (3.4.27-9). Emilia's reaction towards male jealousy, one which becomes more articulate over the course of the play, is energised, I suggest, by her own husband's fictitious imaginings. When Othello enters, insisting Desdemona show him her handkerchief, a demand she believes to be 'a trick' to distract her from her defence of Cassio, and she refuses, Othello becomes enraged; all the while, Emilia silently witnesses his eruption. She cannot admit her disloyalty towards Desdemona nor that she gave Iago the handkerchief for fear of retribution from her mistress, her master, and her husband. Her silence in these scenes accentuates her subordinate and conflicting household position. Following Othello's exit, Emilia repeats her earlier question, 'Is not this man jealous?' (3.4.100). She proceeds to comment: "'Tis not a year or two shows us a man. / They are all but stomachs, and we all food: / They eat us hungerly, and when they are full / They belch us' (3.4.104-7). Alfar suggests that Emilia's 'image of woman as the expelled essence of an old and long-digested meal points to the spectral nature of female reputation in the early modern period'.⁴⁴ It is Emilia's belief that husbands make use of their wives and then swiftly dispose of them; this feeling coincides with her earlier

⁴⁴ Alfar, p. 152.

admission, that she is ‘nothing, but to please his [Iago’s] fantasy’. However, Emilia’s statement is one of solidarity. No matter the division of status between mistress and servant, the women begin to discover a common identity through their gendered likeness.

Because of Emilia’s conflicting position within the household order, her loyalty and obedience extend to Iago, Desdemona, and Othello, another source for dramatic tension that emerges from Shakespeare’s deviation from Cinthio’s tale. In act four scene two, Othello expects Emilia’s loyalty to remain with him as he interrogates her about Desdemona and Cassio’s relationship: ‘You have seen nothing, then?’, he asks her, ‘[w]hat, did they never whisper?’ (4.2.1-6). Emilia takes advantage of this private moment with Othello to defend her mistress against his slanderous accusation and to offer him counsel, discouraging such thoughts:

I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,
Lay down my soul at stake: if you think other
Remove your thought, it doth abuse your bosom.
If any wretch have put this in your head
Let heaven requite it with the serpent’s curse,
For if she be not honest, chaste, and true
There’s no man happy: the purest of their wives
Is foul as slander.

(4.2.12-19)

Othello’s assignment highlights Emilia’s divided duty: she must offer loyal service to three different superiors. She cannot admit that her husband possesses the handkerchief, as that would be a form of disloyal service to Iago; however, her silence becomes an act of disloyalty to her mistress and to Othello. Mark Thornton Burnett’s work on *Othello* suggests that early modern drama attends to ‘the woman servant’s ability to speak what polite society deems to be unspeakable’.⁴⁵ However, the agency a female servant has to publicly speak out is, I argue,

⁴⁵ Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (London, New York: Macmillan Press Limited, 1997), p. 141.

directly tied to their social status. Unlike Paulina, who, as I will show, benefits from an elite status in that it grants her authority to speak the unspeakable, Emilia's low social status prevents her from doing so, and she is thus unable to perform good and loyal service to either Desdemona or Othello. At this point in the play, Emilia's need for justice does not override her inferior position – she defends her mistress but cannot speak the truth that will fully exonerate her in Othello's eyes.

When Emilia does not confirm Othello's suspicions, he dismisses her and sends her to fetch Desdemona. Disregarding Emilia's advice against jealousy, he comments, 'She says enough; yet she's a simple bawd, / That cannot say as much' (4.2.20-1). Othello blames Emilia for facilitating Desdemona's affair with Cassio. In labelling her 'a simple bawd', he removes any authority she may have gained from being an elite servant and reduces her to her sexual status. The coupling of social status with sexual status serves as a form of subordination. Efforts to determine and label a woman's perceived sexuality can be used to undermine their actions and status. When Emilia returns with Desdemona, Othello demeans her position: 'Some of your function, mistress, / Leave procreants alone and shut the door; / Cough, or cry hem, if anybody come. / Your mystery, your mystery: nay, dispatch!' (4.2.27-30). Throughout the play, both Othello's and Iago's rhetoric reduces Emilia to her sexual status – 'bawd' and 'housewife' (or 'hussy') – as a mechanism of social control. Othello, furthermore, treats her as one would a bawd and suggests that she should inhabit the qualities of that role: remain silent and leave them to their own activity. Whipday notes that 'Othello invokes the stereotypes of adultery: the enclosed space, with a shut door, where solitude is possible. The figure of the guarding servant is inverted; he suggests that Emilia, like the chamber, does not guard the chastity of her mistress, but rather

makes unchastity possible'.⁴⁶ Othello's linking of Emilia's sexuality with unchaste actions of service is a form of subjugation. However, when Othello then pays Emilia for her silence – 'there's your money for your pains, / I pray you turn the key and keep our counsel' (4.2.95-6) – he does so not only as one would a bawd, but also with the expectation that her allegiance of loyalty will now remain with him. Othello pays Emilia to serve his needs.

However, as Emilia rebels against Othello's demand, she arouses household disorder. She brings Iago to Desdemona and reveals her master's secret: 'Alas, Iago, my lord hath so bewhored her, / Thrown such despite and heavy terms upon her [...] He called her whore' (4.2.117-122). Emilia's acknowledgement of Othello's accusation is an act of disloyal service to her master and also makes public her mistress's slander. Jardine argues that Emilia's repetition and circulation of Desdemona's defamation thus reinforces and confirms it.⁴⁷ In Emilia's defence of her mistress, she contributes to her undoing: 'I will be hanged if some external villain [...] to get some office, / Have not devised this slander, I'll be hanged else!' (4.2.132-5). Emilia fails as a servant as she publicly acknowledges the accusation against her mistress. Following her scrutiny of her master's actions, 'Why should he call her whore? Who keeps her company? / What place, what time, what form, what likelihood / The Moor's abused by some most villainous knave', Iago commands Emilia to be silent and 'speak within doors', cautioning against the further spread of slander (4.2.139-146). Clare McManus observes that 'the play obsessively polices women's movements'.⁴⁸ As Iago instructs Emilia to 'speak within doors', he seeks to control Emilia's speech as it moves from private to public conversation. But, in a moment of open

⁴⁶ Whipday, p. 147.

⁴⁷ Jardine, p. 28.

⁴⁸ Clare McManus, 'The Vere Street Desdemona: *Othello* and the Theatrical Englishwoman, 1602-1660' in *Women Making Shakespeare: Text, Reception and Performance*, eds. Gordon McMullan, Lena Cowen Orlin, Virginia Mason Vaughan (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 143-149, p. 145.

defiance which I have previously drawn attention to, Emilia refuses to obey her husband: 'O fie upon them! some such squire was he / That turned your wit the seamy side without / And made you to suspect me with the Moor' (4.2.139,147-9). This is a significant moment for Emilia's character. She not only makes public her own defamation by speaking of it in front of her mistress, thus slandering her own reputation, but she also familiarises Desdemona with Iago's suspicions of Emilia and Othello's infidelity.

Performances do not seem to know how to handle this moment. In the Globe's 2007 production, Iago and Emilia play this as an aside: Desdemona is upstage and does not visibly react nor appear to overhear Emilia's accusation. In the National Theatre's 2013 production, Emilia, Iago and Desdemona are positioned within a small, military-style bedroom. Desdemona is weeping on the bed, Iago comforts her, and Emilia stands nearby. When Emilia accuses Iago, she does so knowing that Desdemona will overhear. However, Desdemona does not react to Emilia's accusation, but rather weeps throughout it. In the RSC's 2015 production, Desdemona is standing directly behind Iago and Emilia as Emilia confronts her husband, but Desdemona does not visibly register what she has just heard. In all three productions, Desdemona ignores Emilia's comment and instead immediately silences her servant when she asks, 'O God Iago, / What shall I do to win my lord again?' (4.2.150-1). Emilia speaks what should be kept secret, and in doing so, she presents as neither an obedient wife nor servant. However, these productions negate the significance of Emilia's accusation by choosing not to have Desdemona visibly react. Emilia is unfortunately unable to achieve justice in this scene. As she challenges household and social hierarchies of order, she is ultimately silenced by both her husband and mistress, further emphasising her subordinate position.

When, in the following scene, the women are left alone, Desdemona asks Emilia if ‘there be women do abuse their husbands / In such gross kind’ and questions if Emilia would do ‘such a deed for all the world?’ (4.3.61-62).⁴⁹ The women engage in a conversation about cuckoldry and marriage, and I suggest there is an additional layer of hierarchical negotiation at this moment in the play, in which two women from different social positions critique gendered authority.⁵⁰ In the private, feminine space, Desdemona not only confides in her servant her own fears, but also offers Emilia a platform to speak not as a servant, but as a wife. When Desdemona asks if Emilia ‘[w]ould do such a deed for the whole world’, she replies: ‘The world’s a huge thing; it is a great price / For a small vice’ (4.3.67-69). Emilia, as an untitled ensign’s wife, is driven by the prospect of mobility. Carol Thomas Neely observes that the women in *Othello* ‘are not foolishly idealistic or foolishly cynical as the men are’.⁵¹ Emilia, rather, explains her reasoning with a social logic. She explains to Desdemona that she would not abuse her husband for material objects like ‘joint-ring[s] [...] gowns, petticoats [...] nor any petty exhibition’: that is, she would not abuse her husband to gain the outward appearance of status, but rather to gain the opportunities mobility and status offered – ‘But for all the world? ud’s pity, who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch?’ (4.3.71-5). Jeremy Lopez suggests that at this

⁴⁹ It is important to draw attention to the fact that in the early modern period, both Desdemona and Emilia would have been played by boy actors. McManus also draws from what I earlier described as Jonathan Gil Harris’s description of ‘crumpled time’, to propose that this scene (4.3) ‘is a complementary scene of temporal folding around the body of the singing boy -- who, in the domestic, feminized setting of the bedchamber, stands for the lamenting Desdemona -- and around the theatrical and somatic iteration of the Willow Song: its matter is the singing body of the boy actor’. See Clare McManus, “‘Sing it Like Poor Barbary’: *Othello* and Early Modern Women’s Performance’ in *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Volume 33, Number 1, Spring 2015, pp. 99-120, p. 104.

⁵⁰ The differences between the Quarto and Folio version of this scene, as Clare McManus acknowledges, are notable: the Folio version contains ‘dialogue, the “Willow Song”, and Emilia’s speech on husbands, all of which are missing from the Quarto’. McManus suggests that ‘[t]here has been speculation that the song was cut from the Quarto because when the text was solidified, the company lacked an actor -- Desdemona was probably played by an adolescent male -- capable of singing the part’. See Clare McManus, ‘Textual Introduction’ in *Othello*, Norton 3 edition (2016), pp. 2081-2, p. 2081. For further discussion on the textual differences in this scene in the Quarto and Folio, see E. A. J. Honigmann, ‘The Texts of ‘Othello’ and Shakespearian Revision’ (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 10-12; Michael Neill’s edition of *Othello* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), specifically, pp. 405-433.

⁵¹ Neely, p. 139.

moment ‘the voice of the honest servant bursts forth once more’.⁵² However, I suggest Emilia engages in this debate more so as a lower status wife than as a servant.

As Emilia continues her argument stating, ‘it is their husbands’ faults / If wives do fall’, her remarks become far more personal (4.3.85-6). Both Desdemona’s and Emilia’s reputations have been stained by their husbands’ fantastical jealousies. In her speech, she invites Desdemona to critique her husband. Invoking Othello’s actions – ‘Say that they [...] break out in peevish jealousies, / Throwing restraint upon us; or say that they strike us, / Or scant our former having in despite’ – Emilia seeks to find a common identity with Desdemona, one linked through gender rather than status (4.3.86-90). As Neely notes, ‘Desdemona’s and Emilia’s contrasting viewpoints in the willow scene have led critics to think of them as opposites, but they have much in common’.⁵³ To highlight their similarities, Emilia shifts their conversation from a wife’s wrongdoing (cuckoldry) to a husband’s (adultery). As she deconstructs the ethics of adultery, ‘What is it that they do / When they change us for others? Is it sport? / I think it is. And doth affection breed it? / I think it doth’, invoking a woman’s right to ‘revenge’, Emilia draws attention to gendered social systems of superiority and inferiority that nevertheless regard women as subordinates (4.3.95-8). Her conclusion, ‘else let them know, / The ills we do, their ills instruct us so’, reminiscent of Shylock’s accusation – ‘The villainy you teach me, I will execute’ – in *The Merchant of Venice*, returns the blame of cuckoldry on to the men.⁵⁴ Emilia seeks to remove the blame of household disorder from the wife and place it on the husband. This is a powerful moment in which Emilia, the twice over subordinate, has the opportunity to defend herself: however, because of her low status, she can only do so in the private, feminine space. As

⁵² Lopez, p. 176.

⁵³ Neely, p. 140.

⁵⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, The Arden Third Series, ed. John Drakakis (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2011), 3.1.64-5.

I will show in the next section, having an elite status, as Paulina does, allows her to speak out in a public arena.

Emilia's speech shows how painfully aware she is of her current position, as a woman who is subordinate to Iago, Othello and Desdemona. The chaos that ensues in the play's final scene is, I propose, a direct result of her household, social, and gendered subordination. Until now, Emilia has only addressed Othello as 'my lord' or 'master', labels which acknowledge his household superiority. But with the death of her mistress, Emilia's rhetoric shifts as she discovers her own authority in opposition to Othello's tyranny.⁵⁵ As Robert C. Evans observes, 'no one except Emilia condemns Othello in racial terms as the play closes and as Desdemona lies murdered on her bed'.⁵⁶ Othello's justification for murder, that his wife was unchaste – 'She turned to folly, and she was a whore' – rhetorically blackens Desdemona's reputation (5.2.130). Emilia's defense reinforces the whiteness (and therefore chastity) of her mistress's reputation by racially denigrating her master: 'Thou dost belie her, and thou art a devil. [...] She was too fond of her most filthy bargain! [...] O gull, O dolt, / As ignorant as dirt!' (5.2.153, 159-60). Emilia renounces Othello's superiority as she hurls insults of filth and dirt – signifiers of blackness – at her master. Arthur Little Jr. suggests that this moment 'reinforces the angelic essence of Desdemona's whiteness'.⁵⁷ Although Othello's gender and status outweigh her own, in placing his blackness below Desdemona's whiteness, Emilia employs social properties of whiteness such as chastity and nobility (those which I explore in Chapter Three) to denigrate his authority. In

⁵⁵ See Bradley J. Irish's article for a detailed analysis of racial disgust in early modern English literature and culture. Bradley J. Irish, 'Racial Disgust in Early Modern England: The Case of *Othello*' in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Volume 73, Issue 3-4, Fall-Winter 2022, pp. 224–245.

⁵⁶ Robert C. Evans, 'Introduction' in *Othello: A Critical Reader*, ed. Robert C. Evans (London, New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), pp. 1-14, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Arthur Little Jr., 'Is It Possible to Read Shakespeare through Critical White Studies?' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 268-280, p. 276.

doing so, she employs whiteness as a racial category. Although Emilia's whiteness is categorically and socially different from Desdemona's – in that she lacks the elite status often associated with white nobility –, Emilia employs it to link herself to her mistress. In her defense of Desdemona's innocence, Emilia forgoes socially acceptable behaviour to accuse Othello of that which he accused Desdemona.

Desdemona's death elicits the rupturing of household order: Emilia is left without a mistress and returns to her singular status as an ensign's wife. Although doubting her husband, Emilia initially remains loyal to him; upon his entrance, she insists he '[d]isprove this villain, if thou be'st a man; / He says thou told'st him that his wife was false, / I know thou didst not, thou'rt not such a villain' (5.2.168-70). Emilia employs her husband to challenge her master, an act which her status and gender makes difficult to accomplish. When he refuses her demand, the full weight of his actions begins to creep in, and Emilia seeks to disassociate herself from him. In this moment of disorder, Emilia's need for justice circumvents engrained social hierarchies which intentionally subordinate her. She refuses to obey Iago's commands – 'I charge you, get you home' – and rather pleads with the gentlemen present to supersede her husband's authority: 'Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak. 'Tis proper I obey him – but not now. / Perchance Iago, I will ne'er go home' (5.2.191-4). Emilia's disobedience to her husband marks a break in his authority over her. However, it is not until Othello divulges the reason for his suspicions of Desdemona – that Cassio had acquired the handkerchief – that Emilia realises the full extent of her conflicting loyalty. Emilia's subsequent admission, 'that handkerchief thou speak'st of / I found by fortune and did give my husband', is an act of justice which realigns her loyalty with her mistress and negates her social identity as Iago's wife (5.2.223-4).

Emilia's final request after Iago stabs her – 'lay me by my mistress' side' – is unusual as it removes her identity as a wife (5.2.248). She is laid to rest with her mistress, an addition to the tragic tableau.⁵⁸ As I discussed in the Introduction, Michael Neill suggests that Othello's 'place is symbolically usurped' by Emilia: her request violates the decorum of the social hierarchy.⁵⁹ Emilia appropriates household hierarchies which distinguish her as a subordinate to assume her master's position in death. Building on Neill's argument, I propose that Emilia dies with higher status than she ever could acquire while living. Her request restores her identity to that of an elite woman's attendant rather than as a lowly ensign's wife. In death, her low status, which has hindered her from speaking the truth throughout the play, is overlooked and her final deed of justice is remembered. Death both confirms and removes Emilia's authority.

Throughout *Othello*, Shakespeare draws on Emilia's divided duty as both a wife and servant to elicit disorder within the household. In doing so, he underscores how actions, particularly acts of service, are shaped by social status. The tensions between Emilia's position as Iago's wife and her role as Desdemona and Othello's servant are central to the plot as Emilia's various attempts to perform good and loyal service are thwarted. Throughout the play, Emilia is frequently disempowered by her subordinate position. Unable to defy authority, it is only after Desdemona's death that Emilia successfully champions her mistress's innocence. Reading Emilia through the perspective of status – understanding how she is a lower status wife trying to perform as an elite female servant – helps us understand her own specific tragedy. Whereas Emilia is hindered by her low social status and her conflicting household position, as the next

⁵⁸ In McManus's 'Vere Street', she observes that this moment proves challenging for editors alike. 'Some editors ignore this, adding a stage direction to remove her body at the end of the scene, excluding Emilia from the final tableau. Others insert a direction that she be moved to the bed to join Desdemona, emphasizing her role as another murdered wife and her mistress's compromised confidante' (p. 147).

⁵⁹ Michael Neill, *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics, and Society in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 258.

section will show, Paulina is empowered by her elite social status. Drawing connections between these two plays by way of female characters performing acts of service illuminates the ways in which household ordering and social positions fashion a character's identity, and how this identity shapes the way one enacts service.

The Power of Status in *The Winter's Tale*

Critics who compare Shakespeare's Emilia in *Othello* and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* marvel at their respective defenses against male tyranny and champion the ways in which their feminist agendas promote female alliance. Marianne Novy observes how 'eventually, Emilia defends Desdemona as strongly as Beatrice and Paulina stand up for their friends accused of infidelity'.⁶⁰ Marguerite Tassi suggests that 'Paulina resembles Emilia in her fierce defence of her friend's honor, and, like Emilia, she serves the vindictive function in the play'.⁶¹ Evelyn Gajowski argues that women like Emilia and Paulina 'and other shrews on the early modern English stage' are the best characters 'to call patriarchal structures into question when male characters abuse their power'.⁶² The critical tendency to compare these women through their speech and critique of social conventions means that the effect social and sexual status can have on characters' speech and actions is often ignored. Furthermore, scholars do not often consider the parallels between instances of female service across plays. Written nearly a decade apart, both *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale* have an Emilia: a female servant to a slandered mistress. Although Emilia of *The Winter's Tale* is contracted in service to Hermione (and is therefore, an elite female servant), in this final section, I suggest we place not Emilia but the much more obviously elite figure of

⁶⁰ Marianne Novy, *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), p. 135.

⁶¹ Marguerite Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011), p. 272.

⁶² Evelyn Gajowski, "'Sigh No More, Ladies, Sigh No More': Genesis Deconstructed in Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado about Nothing*", in *Journal of Theatre and Drama* 5- 6 (1999), pp. 101-126, p. 117.

Paulina in dialogue with *Othello*'s Emilia. There are similarities to be considered, of course, as well as important differences, and key among the latter is that Paulina is not a servant, despite the fact that she performs acts of service, but rather an elite lady whose status offers her more autonomy than Emilia's lower status would ever allow. As I have shown, Emilia is an ensign's wife and of lower status than would normally be the case for the elite servant of a mistress of Desdemona's rank. By placing the elite figure of Paulina in dialogue with *Othello*'s Emilia, I aim to explore the intertextual connections between the women in both plays through way of service and status. Doing so, I propose, can expand our understanding of female service and social status across early modern drama, allowing for a more developed and nuanced reading of these popular plays.

Although Dorothea Kehler's chapter 'Shakespeare's Emilias and the Politics of Celibacy' does notably study the women in both plays intertextually, I suggest she misreads Emilia's position in *Othello*, assuming that both Paulina and Emilia hold elite status.⁶³ Kehler claims that 'as Desdemona's lady-in-waiting, Emilia enjoys more prestige than a menial servant'.⁶⁴ Whereas 'lady-in-waiting' may be the appropriate term to describe Emilia in *The Winter's Tale*, it is in fact not applicable to Emilia in *Othello*, for the specific historical reasons that she is not a lady and she is not in service to a queen. Kehler also claims that Paulina 'behaves much like Emilia and [...] serves a similar dramatic purpose'.⁶⁵ Although both women associate with a slandered mistress, Paulina's elite status empowers her to advocate for her living queen, therefore in fact serving a vastly different dramatic purpose from *Othello*'s Emilia. Paulina, nevertheless, does indeed perform acts of service for the king and queen, but it is important to stress that she is not

⁶³ Dorothea Kehler, 'Shakespeare's Emilias and the Politics of Celibacy' in *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama* (New Jersey, London: The Scarecrow Press, 1991), pp. 157-180.

⁶⁴ Kehler, p. 163.

⁶⁵ Kehler, p. 158.

bound in service; she is, in other words, not an elite female servant but an elite wife who enacts service.

In this chapter's final section, I demonstrate how reading popular Shakespearean characters through an historically informed understanding of social status, alongside a heightened awareness of the nature and structure of early modern service, can change our understanding of their identity and the ways in which their social position influences their actions. Drawing parallels between Emilia and Paulina underscores the fact neither woman resembles the typical elite female servant, while also demonstrating how social status informs how service identities were conceptualised in the early modern period. Although Paulina may carry out acts of service, that does not necessarily mean that we should identify her as a servant; she is not contracted in the institution of service but is, rather, a courtier's wife. The effect of Paulina's status on her acts of service is arguably overlooked because of critical interest in the play's broader themes, but when we juxtapose her position with that of Emilia in *Othello*, the ways in which status impacts a character's actions and her performance of service becomes all the more obvious. I propose that Paulina is able to perform such extraordinary acts of service of her own accord precisely because of her elite status.

Paulina is Shakespeare's addition to the plot. She is the vessel through which Shakespeare gives his tragic source – Robert Greene's *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (1588), which ends with the suicide of the Leontes figure – an uncomfortably 'comedic' reconciliation. Throughout Shakespeare's play, Paulina's audacious actions take centre stage as she controls and manipulates Leontes, orchestrating the play's final spectacle, which serves to restore order to the monarchy. It is, I wish to argue, her elite status which enables her to perform such extraordinary acts of service, acts so extraordinary that they change the course of the play. Her status permits

her to advocate on Hermione's behalf, challenging Leontes's tyrannical behaviour; it provides her with the authority to publicly rebuke Leontes's actions and deny and appropriate his position as the grieving widower; it allows her to control both the body politic and the corporeal body of the monarch, sustaining Leontes's celibacy until the oracle is fulfilled; and, finally, it offers her the ability to claim the use of magic which restores and reunites the royal family, thus redeeming the dramatic situation. Although scholars often consider Paulina to be the play's 'stage manager', orchestrating events off stage until they culminate in the final scene, it is not clear whether Shakespeare intended it to be so or whether he simply digressed from his source in the penultimate scene. Shakespeare meticulously follows his main source's narrative, with a few additional characters – Paulina, Antigonus, Autolycus, and the Bear. Greene's text was popular; it is likely that because *Pandosto* ends with the title character's death, an early modern audience would not only recognise the resemblance of the two plots, but might also likely presume that *The Winter's Tale*, following *Pandosto*'s narrative, would conclude with Leontes's suicide.⁶⁶ However, the addition of Paulina allows *The Winter's Tale* to have a different outcome.

From her first entrance, Paulina establishes her superiority and gentility. She does not introduce herself but rather asks the Gaoler, '[n]ow good sir, / You know me, do you not?', to which he replies, identifying her as 'a worthy lady, / And one who much I honour' (2.2.4-6). She

⁶⁶ John Pitcher notes that Greene's text was reprinted at least four times between 1588 and 1609 before Shakespeare used it as his source (p. 405). Shakespeare also tacitly references two further texts in his conclusion of *The Winter's Tale*: Ovid's tale of *Pygmalion* – as the statue comes to life – and Dekker, Chettle, and Haughton's play *Patient Grissil* (1599) in which a father pretends to marry his daughter but actually marries his wife. Shakespeare reverses the twist, so the joke is on Leontes (rather than on the much-abused Patient Grissil), with the women managing the spectacle. In *Patient Grissil*, the joke is played on Gwyenthyan, the elite Welsh widow who marries Sir Owen. Neither the medieval tale, *Patient Griselda*, nor *Pandosto* include a widow figure. This is Dekker's addition, which Shakespeare potentially included in his play through Paulina. Grace McCarthy suggests in her article which examines *Patient Grissil* as a source for *The Winter's Tale*, that Dekker specifies a sixteen-year gap before Grissil reunites with her children. She draws attention to Shakespeare's choice of the exact same length of time, arguing that *Patient Grissil* acts as a direct source for *The Winter's Tale*. See Grace McCarthy, 'The Evolution of the Patient Woman: Examining Patient Griselda as a Source for Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*', *Early Modern Literary Studies* Vol. 20, No. 2 (2018).

employs her elite status to further her agenda: since the king has refused Hermione visitors, Paulina calls on the Gaoler to bring forth Emilia, one of the queen's 'women' (2.2.10). Hitherto unnoticed, Paulina notably distinguishes herself from Hermione's personal servants, entering instead with her own 'attendants', a symbol of her wealth and status. When Emilia informs her of Hermione's delivery, Paulina volunteers her service to Hermione: 'He [Leontes] must be told on't, and he shall. The office / Becomes a woman best; I'll take't upon me' (2.2.30-31). Alfar suggests that Paulina's action 'redefines appropriate conduct for women' and that 'challenging male authority, even the authority of a king, is woman's work'.⁶⁷ However, as Emilia later notes, this task is not one for any woman, but for someone of high social status. Emilia tells Paulina that Hermione had earlier 'hammered of this design, / But durst not tempt a minister of honour / Lest she should be denied' (2.3.48-50). By offering to act as Hermione's advocate, a role which Paulina's status allows her to carry out, she displays her obedience to the queen. Paulina pointedly does not offer herself as a servant, but rather as a personal ally, and as such she does not expect a reward for the transaction of her service in this specific errand, as would a servant. As Emilia praises Paulina's proposal, 'Most worthy madam, / Your honour and your goodness is so evident [...] there is no lady living / So meet for this great errand', she again acknowledges that it is Paulina's nobility which allows for her to take on the role of Hermione's advocate (2.2.41-45). It is Paulina's elite status which, I propose, enables her to champion Hermione's innocence for the remainder of the play, performing acts of service without literally being in service.

When Paulina enters Leontes's private quarters to advocate for Hermione, she oversteps her social position as a wife and subject: both Leontes and Antigonus have forbidden her from

⁶⁷ Alfar, p. 175.

visiting the king. Her disobedience reflects an unwillingness to adhere to social order. When Leontes critiques Antigonus's control over his wife, 'What, canst not rule her?', Paulina's response serves as justification for her defiance:

From all dishonesty he can; in this –
Unless he take the course that you have done,
Commit me for committing honour – trust it,
He shall not rule me.

(2.3.46-9)

Peter Erickson has argued that in *The Winter's Tale*, women's 'power as facilitators is used to reform rather than to transcend the patriarchal framework', and it is precisely this which Paulina intends for her service to accomplish.⁶⁸ It is Paulina's need to right a wrong, to cure Leontes of his 'tyrannous passion', and to restore order to society that justifies her disobedience; for Paulina, disobedience is a form of reformation. Early modern courtier books advise that, when contending with a tyrannical master, it is incumbent upon the courtier to assume the role of the teacher and heal his master of immoral conduct. Richard Strier's analysis of George Buchanan's theological discourse, *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* (1579), concludes that 'disobedience is true loyalty to an immoral commander', and that 'the disobedient servant [...] [must be] the good Physician'.⁶⁹ Paulina assumes these methods:

I
Do come with words as medicinal as true,
Honest as either, to purge him of that humour
That presses him from sleep.
(2.3.35-38)

⁶⁸ Peter Erickson, *Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 167.

⁶⁹ Richard Strier, *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 175.

She offers to cure Leontes, insisting that she is his ‘loyal servant [...] physician [...] [and] most obedient counsellor’ (2.3.53-54).⁷⁰ However, the ways in which Paulina acts as a counsellor or physician for Leontes, and as Hermione’s advocate are qualitatively different from the ways in which other elite women enact these roles in early modern drama. In *All’s Well that Ends Well*, Helen, as I have previously noted, offers her services to the King to cure him of his fistula. She adopts the role of physician but employs her femininity to convince the King of the credibility of her services. In Fletcher and Shakespeare’s *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the Three Queens interrupt Thesus and Hippolyta’s wedding ceremony to petition Thesus to go to war against Creon, who has deprived their dead husbands of formal burial. The First Queen appeals to his masculinity, begging him to fight for justice: ‘I hope some god [...] hath put his mercy in your manhood, / Where to he’ll infuse power, and press you forth / Our undertaker’ (1.1.71-4).⁷¹ As ‘troubled’ Thesus contemplates their demand, the Second and Third Queen turn to Hippolyta and Emilia to advocate on their behalf (1.1.77). The Second Queen pleads with Hippolyta:

Bid him that we, whom flaming war doth scorch,
Under the shadow of his sword may cool us.
Require him he advance it o’er our heads.
Speak’t in a woman’s key; like such a woman
As any of us three; weep ere you fail.
(1.1.91-5)

Brown suggests that ‘[w]omen under attack often turned to friends and neighbors for support and protection; women often rallied to the aid of other women’.⁷² When the supplication enacted by the Three Queens does not sway immediately Thesus, Hippolyta entreats him to take action:

Prorogue this business we are going about and hang

⁷⁰ See Chapter Three in Jessica Murphy’s *Virtuous Necessity: Conduct Literature and the Making of the Virtuous Woman in Early Modern England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015) for a reading of Paulina as a witch who employs ‘counter-magic’ to heal and restore the monarchy.

⁷¹ John Fletcher and William Shakespeare, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. Lois Potter (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 1996).

⁷² Brown, p. 119.

Your shield afore your heart, about that neck
Which is my fee and which I freely lend
To do these poor queens service.

(1.1.196-9)

Hippolyta's petition that Theseus delay their marriage and go to war on behalf of the women is an act of service, one which she 'freely lends' to the women. Although this 'service' disrupts the wedding ceremony, deferring it for a period of time, it does not unravel the social order.

Paulina's service, on the other hand, is disruptive.

Leontes's deep fear of women usurping his authority is most evident in this scene. After Paulina presents him with his newborn child, he attempts to subordinate her, drawing attention to how her lack of silence and disobedience threatens his position: 'A mankind witch [...] a most intelligencing bawd [...] A callat / Of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband, / And now baits me!' (2.3.66-67, 89-91). His rhetoric parallels Othello's: both Emilia and Paulina are accused of facilitating their wives' suspected affairs. Leontes's insults of 'bawd', 'witch', and 'callat' are all sexual and seek to undermine Paulina's social standing, presenting her as a risk to social order. His descriptions of her as a procuress, as unwomanly, and as a scold draw from common abuses against lower status women to highlight her refusal to be modest and submissive. Just as Othello sexualises Emilia in order to assert social control, coupling her social and sexual status, Leontes's sexual insults seek to circumscribe Paulina's social status. As Susan Amussen notes, scolding women – those that rebuked patriarchal authority – 'were a threat not just because they disrupted the community, but because they often disrupted the household; they were frequently assumed to reject their husbands' domestic authority or to commit adultery'.⁷³ Leontes's scathing remarks, that Antigonus 'dreads his wife', condemns his lack of authority

⁷³ Susan D. Amussen, 'The Contradictions of Patriarchy in Early Modern England' in *Gender & History*, Vol.30 No.2 July 2018, pp. 343–353, p. 348.

over his wife. He seems to suggest that Antigonus's household disorder extends to affect the greater social order. In usurping her husband's authority, Paulina undermines structures of subservience.

Unlike Emilia and the lower status women whom records tell us were accused of scolding in ecclesiastical courts, Paulina is neither punished nor condemned for her disobedience.⁷⁴ Leontes's warnings – 'I'll ha' thee burnt' – all the more encourage her to disregard social hierarchies of order to combat his injustice (2.3.112). As she dismisses his empty threats, 'I care not', she all but accuses Leontes of tyranny: 'I'll not call you tyrant; / But this most cruel usage of your queen [...] something savours / Of tyranny and will ignoble make you' (2.3.114-8). John Pitcher notes that 'to accuse a king of being despotic was the gravest of insults, and the charge prays on Leontes' mind'.⁷⁵ Neither obedient nor silent, and verging on treason, Paulina sees it as her duty as a woman to reform the king. Brown notes that after Paulina's excoriation, Leontes fails to 'denounce her as a shrew, whore, and witch': 'In linguistic terms he has been shown to be hurling slanders, not truth statements. Although Paulina apologizes (strategically) for exceeding the bounds of speech, it does not follow that she is a "justified shrew" in the eyes of all watching'.⁷⁶ Unlike Emilia, who is silenced and condemned for speaking out publicly against male jealousy, Paulina's dismisses Leontes's callous insults to champion Hermione's innocence, while also distancing herself from being socially and legally accepted as scold.⁷⁷ However, in this scene, I suggest Paulina, too, fails in her endeavour as Leontes' jealousy drives him to continue to seek legal justice against Hermione.

⁷⁴ See Amussen's article for a detailed analysis of scolds and cuckolds in early modern ecclesiastical courts.

⁷⁵ Pitcher, p. 214.

⁷⁶ Brown, p. 197.

⁷⁷ Brown suggests that '[u]nlike talking about one's neighbors, scolding was a chronic, legally actionable offense' (p. 61). See pp. 60-62, and 196-8 in *Better a Shrew* for more on scolding and Paulina as a licensed scold.

It is only through Hermione's and Antigonus's supposed deaths that Paulina can hold power over Leontes. Throughout the court scene, Paulina remains silent, unable to publicly defend the queen. It is not until Hermione faints at the news of Mamillius's death that Paulina comments: 'This news is mortal to the queen. Look down / And see what death is doing' (3.2.145-6). When Paulina re-enters, she does so in a position of power, and it is this new-found authority that allows her to speak out publicly against Leontes: 'What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me? / What wheels, racks, fires? What flaying, boiling / In leads or oils?' (3.2.172-174). In a speech which lasts nearly twenty-five lines, Paulina rebukes Leontes's tyrannous actions:

That thou betrayed'st Polixenes, 'twas nothing
 [...]
 Nor was't much
 Thou would have poisoned good Camillo's honour,
 To have him kill a king – poor trespasses,
 More monstrous standing by; whereof I reckon
 The casting forth to crows thy baby daughter
 [...]
 Nor is't directly laid to thee the death
 Of the young prince
 [...]
 But the last – O lords,
 When I have said, cry woe! The queen, the queen,
 The sweetest, dearest creature's dead, and vengeance for't
 Not dropped down yet.

(3.2.182-199)

In this moment, Paulina's challenge against patriarchal authority and female subservience advances. She lies about Hermione's death so that she may publicly denounce Leontes's actions and champion Hermione's innocence.⁷⁸ The disorder Leontes blamed on Hermione's adultery,

⁷⁸ Alfar observes that Hermione's 'return is staged [...] not as a reward to the reformed monarch but as her own voluntary and deliberate return upon her daughter's homecoming. "I / Knowing by Paulina that the oracle / Gave hope thou wast in being," she tells Perdita, "have preserv'd / Myself to see the issue" (5.3.125–8). These lines tell us first that Hermione was not dead at the end of act three, scene two; second, they reveal that Paulina told her of the Oracle's pronouncement (though as others have noted, she would have heard this declaration); third, they make it unequivocally clear that the only reason to return is the hope of her daughter's survival and arrival at the Sicilian court' (p. 184).

Paulina attributes to his jealousy. Her lie enables her not only to protect Hermione but also to reject Leontes's authority, thus reversing social hierarchies of order. Feminist readings of this scene tend to focus on Paulina's defiant speech and the ways in which she resembles the figure of the 'revenger'.⁷⁹ However, scholars have not considered how Paulina's status enables her to inhabit this figure and thus to speak so boldly. I suggest it is the coupling of her elite position with the fact that Leontes's tyranny has reverberated to affect her own household, thus leaving her in an uncertain position without a husband, that allows her to supersede the king's authority. As Paulina usurps Leontes's position as the greiving widower, denying him a chance to mourn – 'I'll not remember you of my own lord, / Who is lost too' – she blames Leontes's jealousy for rupturing not only his royal family, but also her own (3.2.227- 8). As I have already suggested, without proof of Antigonus's death, Paulina is left in a liminal state between wife and widow.⁸⁰ Kehler suggests that women who hold an 'ambiguous status as neither wives nor widows, gain authority usually denied to women who fit too easily into traditional gender roles'.⁸¹ This is truly the case for Paulina for without a husband to oversee her actions, her uncertain position now grants her the authority to overstep social hierarchies of order.

⁷⁹ Although there are countless studies of Paulina's speech and her role as the revenger, here are some prominent examples. For Paulina as the revenge figure, see Bailey Sincox, 'The Winter's Tale and Revenge Tragedy' in *Shakespeare Studies* 47, (2019), pp. 233-260; Marguerite Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011); Huston Diehl, "Does not the stone rebuke me?": The Pauline Rebuke and Paulina's Lawful Magic in The Winter's Tale' in *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, ed. Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 69-82. For feminist scholarship on Paulina's defiant speech, see, Chapter Five in Alfar's *Women and Shakespeare's Cuckoldry Plays*; Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Lynn Enterline, "You Speak a Language that I Understand Not": The Rhetoric of Animation in *The Winter's Tale*' in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Spring, 1997, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 17-44.

⁸⁰ Paulina does not know Antigonus's whereabouts, only that he is 'lost', i.e., presumed dead. Although she accepts the loss of her husband, she cannot legally claim to be a widow until she acquires proof of his death (which occurs, as we learn, in 5.2).

⁸¹ Dorothea Kehler, *Shakespeare's Widows* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 57. Similarly, in Mendelson and Crawford's *Women in Early Modern England*, they suggest that although widowhood did not earn a women independence, it was a time of maximum female autonomy (p. 180).

An exchange of authority occurs between Paulina and Leontes, which we see developed in the final act, sixteen years later. Cleomenes and Dion arrive to put an end to Leontes's penitence, 'Sir, you have done enough, and have performed / A saint-like sorrow', and persuade him to remarry, 'What holier, than for royalty's repair / For present comfort and for future good, / To bless the bed of majesty again / With a sweet fellow to't?' (5.1.1-2, 31-4). Throughout this scene, Paulina acts as constant echo of Leontes's transgressions; she is the vehicle through which Hermione's memory lives. She does not hold back in reminding him of the effect of his actions, but rather, speaks freely. Brown suggests that 'throughout those sixteen years Paulina continues to scold the king, who urges her to do so'.⁸² To demonstrate her control, and to undermine the advice of Cleomenes and Dion, Paulina persuades Leontes to relinquish his power over the body politic of the nation. She not only asks him, 'Will you swear / Never to marry but by my free leave?', but also convinces him that upon remarrying he should give her 'the office / To choose you a queen' (5.1.70, 77-8). I propose that this contract is a mechanism of subjugation. Unlike Leontes who assigned Paulina a sexual status to disempower her, Paulina rather removes Leontes's sexual agency to subvert his authority.

The extent of Paulina's power comes into full effect in the final scene, as she orchestrates the reunion of the royal family, thus restoring order to society. When she reveals Hermione's statue, Paulina claims ownership of it, stating: 'for the stone is mine' (5.3.58). Leontes is the first to observe the statue's magical qualities: 'O royal piece! / There's magic in thy majesty' (5.3.38-39). In early modern England, magic was viewed as a male practice. Gareth Roberts notes, '[a]n understanding that was a popular one [...] was that magic was a male art which commands supernatural power, and was quite unlike witchcraft, which was a female practice that

⁸² Brown, p. 196.

supplicates it'.⁸³ The figure of the magician, like Prospero in *The Tempest*, was portrayed as male and cosmopolitan, whereas the witch was female and impoverished; the magician was known to employ magic for healing, unlike the witch who supposedly intended harm.⁸⁴ Throughout this scene, Paulina must disassociate from accusations of illicit behaviour. She distances herself from the charge of witchcraft when she announces that she can make the statue move: 'But then you'll think- / Which I protest against – I am assisted / By wicked powers' (5.3.89-90). Unlike most 'cunning women' in early modern comedies or tragicomedies who employ magic or witchcraft, such as the Wise Woman in Heywood's *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604), Mother Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), or the title character in Lyly's *Mother Bombie* (1594), Paulina is not a marginalised character. Paulina's status allows her to not only remove herself from the accusation of witchcraft, but also to remind Leontes of Hermione's pureness: 'Her actions shall be holy as / You hear my spell is lawful' (5.3.104-105). Just as Helen in *All's Well* employs her dead father's art to heal the king, Paulina's elite status enables her to utilise the magic and wonder of the male artist's creation to reunite the kingdom.

Although wonder overtakes this scene, the denouement is uncomfortable. The metatheatrical spectacle of Hermione's statue "coming to life" through Paulina's magic is a mechanism by which Shakespeare creates a tragedy with a happy ending. But, like the deception Hermione's statue represents, the happy ending appears as an illusion. The restoration of the

⁸³ Gareth Roberts, "An Arte as Lawful as Eating"? Magic in *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* in *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings*, eds. Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 126-142, p. 129.

⁸⁴ See Roberts for further detail on the figure of the Neoplatonic magus (magician) in early modern theology (p. 163). Jessica Murphy's study of Paulina as a witch who performs counter-magic argues that 'Shakespeare presents Paulina as one who uses counter-magic to allow her character to have more freedom to ask questions of violent masculine power, while simultaneously showing her to be "good" and therefore not a serious threat to absolute systems of rule' (p. 79, *Virtuous Necessity*).

social order in *The Winter's Tale* returns everyone to their prescribed social roles, including Paulina. When mother and daughter are reunited, Paulina declares:

Go together,
You precious winners all; your exultation
Partake to everyone. I, an old turtle,
Will wing me to some withered bough, and there
My mate, that's never to be found again,
Lament til I am lost.

(5.3.130-5)

However, Leontes denies Paulina's request. He does not allow her to lament her husband's death, but rather marries her off to Camillo: 'O peace, Paulina! / Thou should a husband take by my consent, / As I by thine a wife' (5.3.135-7). Although this marriage is unnecessary to the plot, it does re-assert social hierarchies of order, enabling Leontes to regain control of the body politic, a role reversal of the past sixteen years. Whereas Carol Thomas Neely suggests of this moment that 'Paulina although still grieving for her own lost husband, accepts the new one her "worth and honesty" merits and begins her own new life', and Jeremy Lopez's recent reading speculates that 'Shakespeare intended Paulina in the final scene to be angling for a marriage to Polixenes', I read this marriage and Paulina's reaction (or lack thereof) as a form of subordination.⁸⁵ Rather than allowing her to remain independent and mourn the loss of her husband, Leontes eliminates any authority she gained through her liminal social position and forces her to return to a subordinate role under her new husband's control. Although the marriage could be read as either a reward for her service or as a punishment for hiding Hermione from him for sixteen years, in binding her to a marriage contract, Leontes removes Paulina's voice.

Pointedly, neither Paulina nor Hermione respond to Leontes's command. Christina Luckyj

⁸⁵ Carol Thomas Neely, 'Women and Issue in *The Winter's Tale*' in *Philological Quarterly*, Spring 1978, pp. 181-194, p. 192; Jeremy Lopez, "'Art Hath an Enemy Cal'd Ignorance': The Prodigal Industry of Early Modern Playwrighting' in *Playing and Playgoing in Early Modern England: Actor, Audience, and Performance*, ed. Simon Smith and Emma Whipday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 142-160, p. 156.

observes that ‘silence in the theatre could go virtually unnoticed or evoke powerful anxiety’.⁸⁶ With Paulina, I suggest the latter is more likely. Paulina’s silence provokes even more discomfort than her speech, prompting Leontes’s final request to her, ‘[h]astily lead away’, preempting any response (5.3.155). Although everyone is married off and the social order is restored, the discomfort of Leontes’s actions permeates the scene, further emphasised by female silence.

Unlike Emilia in *Othello*, who achieves autonomy in death, Paulina loses her independence with the play’s conclusion, forced to return to the subordinate role of wife. Her elite status allows her to act on her own accord, performing acts of service as she sees fit without literally being in service, until Leontes removes that authority in the play’s final moment. Although she remains an elite woman, her own ending is demeaning as she loses her autonomy and is ultimately silenced. Throughout the play, Paulina’s elite status provides her with an authority that an unmarried elite woman contracted in service could never employ to such extraordinary measures. Although critics frequently consider Paulina to be a servant, she is not an elite female servant, but rather an elite woman whose status gives her the ability to perform extraordinary but – crucially – voluntary acts of service. Understanding the meaning of ‘service’ in early modern drama requires an awareness of the centrality of status in the performance of acts of service. Status determines the tenor of the word – how metaphorical service is, depending on the social position of the individual doing the serving. If we do not establish a clear sense of the normal social positions respectively of a servant or a courtly woman performing actions for a queen that function as ‘service’, we will be in danger of blurring lines of status and role that

⁸⁶ Christina Luckyj, *‘A Moving Rhetoricke’: Gender and Silence in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 78.

would have been wholly obvious to Shakespeare's first audiences but which are largely hidden from us today.

In this chapter, I have shown how reading characters from the perspective of social status can challenge our understanding of service identities, gender politics, and social hierarchies of order in early modern drama. Emilia and Paulina are notably different from the characters I have analysed in this thesis's previous chapters, women who are unmarried and contracted in the institution of service. Emilia is assigned a servant role but her position as a lower status wife challenges this servant identity. Paulina, on the other hand, is an elite, married woman who, although often read as a servant, does not identify as a servant. I have argued that, more broadly in early modern society, actions alone did not determine identity. In both these plays, the women's actions clearly overstep their social position and, in the process, undermine patriarchal authority. By reimagining these characters with both status and service in mind, I propose that we can achieve a more nuanced understanding of the way in which their social position shapes their actions throughout the course of the plays in question.

This chapter has demonstrated that examining characters through their performance of service and social status can alter our understanding of social hierarchies of order in early modern England as they are represented on stage. If we do not consider the impact of social status on a character's actions, we risk misunderstanding those actions. If, for instance, we fail to understand the ambiguity of Emilia's household position, an ambiguity which drives Emilia's behaviour throughout the course of the play, we will fail to understand the particular tensions of her situation. If we do not acknowledge that her social status is determined by her husband's position as an untitled ensign, we will fail to acknowledge that she does not have the elite status

she ought to have as Desdemona's attendant and thus that her status restrains her speech and actions until it is too late. I have suggested that, not surprisingly, more opportunities were offered – socially and politically – to those who held an elite social position. It is Paulina's elite status which provides her with the agency to act against social norms; it gives her the choice to be Hermione's advocate and perform acts of service without being defined as a servant. Neither Emilia nor Paulina are, for different reasons, typical elite female servants, and yet by thinking about the ways in which they do not fit the mould we can more fully understand the nuances and contradictions which are central to the social creation of service roles. Emilia's lower status restrains her, whereas Paulina's elite status offers her agency. If we misread the implications of social status, we cannot fully appreciate its significance within the narrative, and we will be in danger of misunderstanding the larger picture. As I have repeatedly shown in the preceding chapters, our engagement with the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries is substantially enhanced by a full understanding of the range of possibilities encompassed by the idea of female service. Similarly, if we do not develop a sense of the conjunction of social forces operating on a female character performing an act of service, we will lose a great deal of the power of Shakespeare's dramatisation of the social world.

Conclusion

Maria Madam, there is at the gate a young gentleman much desires to speak with you. (1.5.95, *Twelfth Night*)

Diaphanta Do you call, madam?
Beatrice Joanna Perfect your service, and conduct this gentleman
The private way you brought him.

Diaphanta I shall, madam.
(2.2.53-55, *The Changeling*)

Duchess [to Cariola] Good dear soul.
Leave me: but place thyself behind the arras,
Where thou mayst overhear us.
(1.1.346-8, *The Duchess of Malfi*)¹

In early modern drama, elite female servants are constantly within reach, just out of earshot and waiting, ready to serve their mistress. They are positioned within the lacuna between on stage and off stage, their presence visible, albeit sometimes hovering on the periphery of both stage and page. As this thesis has established and as the quotations above show, whether it be attending to menial tasks or being entrusted with their mistress's affairs, the service performed by elite female servants is fundamental to the drama of the period. However, as this thesis has sought to demonstrate, there is so much more to these characters than the simple tasks they perform to enable those they serve. How their identities are constructed, the ways in which they take action, and their relationships within the household speak to broader issues of service and social ordering in early modern England. I have argued that reading female servant characters with an understanding of early modern service and status presents us with new insights into a

¹ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, The Arden Third Series, ed. Keir Elam (London, New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2008); Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, ed. Michael Neill (London, New York: Methuen Drama, 2019); John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Brian Gibbons (London: Methuen Drama, 2014).

considerable range of plays from the period. Recognising the confluence of social influences that shape a female servant's identity – such as the construction of gender, race, sexuality, age, and status – only enhances our understanding of an early modern playwright's dramatisation of the social world. Yet at the same time, we must be conscious of the narrow limitations that critics have attached to female servant characters and how this has influenced our understanding of these characters in scholarship and performance to date. This thesis has argued that neither elite female servants nor the service they performed can be understood in isolation from considerations of social status in the early modern period.

This thesis has engaged with a range of critical fields, merging service studies with temporality scholarship, new economic criticism, post-colonial and critical race studies, and feminist scholarship, to reconsider the narratives of elite female servant characters across early modern drama. Thinking about the temporal experience of service and the temporal concept of 'waiting', as I do in Chapter One, elicits a greater understanding of the temporal instability of elite female service, which in turn helps us to understand why these figures are so central to the plot development in these plays. Service, as I have shown, was an unfixed period of socially imposed delay in which elite female servants were expected to wait as a form of service while waiting for marriage. The future-focused nature of the service contract complicates the expected passive and linear progression towards marriage as elite female servants either take action to bring that future into the present moment or purposefully delay that future. My engagement with various early modern plays, but specifically with Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* and Fletcher's *A Wife for a Month*, argues that it is through waiting – both as servants and as women – that elite female servants can facilitate action and resist socially imposed delays. Waiting itself proves to be a state of opposition in which both actions and delays occur. However, issues of

how one waits, and when, exactly, it is justifiable for women to take action, arise in both plays. Whereas Anne passively waits and achieves preferment in *Henry VIII*, the Old Lady, lingering in a period of extended delay, takes action (albeit unsuccessfully) to escape her current situation. Similarly, in *A Wife for a Month*, Cassandra decides to take action but that action ultimately conflicts with her mistress's passive waiting. When we recognise the instability of temporal frameworks of service in these plays, we can better understand both the social construction of gender and of social status, and how these influence a woman's actions within the service period. Reading these plays with attention to their thematic and temporal similarities underscores how service is constructed as a temporal tool for the delay of women, but these women use that delay to create action. It is through waiting that elite female servants discover empowerment.

In Chapter Two, I turned my attention to the interplay between status, sexuality, and the economy in female service to question how elite female servants were valued within a nascent capitalist economy, and how they manipulate their commodity status (as virgins and as elite women) to benefit from various exchanges. Much like the elite female servants analysed in Chapter One, Diaphanta and Helen take action, engaging in economic, political, and sexual exchanges, to acquire social mobility and leave service. I have argued that social status is significant to the ways in which a woman is either constrained or uninhibited by structures of subservience, both within the early modern household and the nascent capitalist society. Whereas Diaphanta is hindered by economic structures and is ultimately unsuccessful in her pursuit of mobility, such economies work to enable Helen's social progression. She manipulates her commodity status to profit from the emerging economy, first as she negotiates with the King to obtain her choice of husband, and then in her economic and sexual exchange with the Florentine women. However, as I have shown, it is through these exchanges that women not only prosper

from but also critique systems of value. In this chapter, I also examined the economic significance of exchanges like the bed trick trope and the ways in which it parodies early modern understandings that a woman's chastity defines her market value. I have argued that this trope disrupts capitalism's arbitrary value system as lower and higher status women conflate their identities to determine their own market value. Recognising the importance of social status to systems of value in the early modern period reveals the way bodies – particularly women's bodies – participated in and were negotiated by networks of exchange.

Chapter Three argued for a greater consideration of elite status when analysing the figure of the Black female servant in early modern drama. By examining how playwrights conceptualised the elite Black female servant in *The White Devil*, *The Knight of Malta*, and *A Forrest Tragedye in Vacunium*, I underscore the ways in which social ideas of race complicate how servant, household, and national identities were fashioned in the early modern period and in its literature. For example, Percy's *A Forrest Tragedye* locates Rhodaghond's household identity within narratives of both elite female service and enslavement: it is ultimately how other characters identify her – be it as a waiting woman or as a slave – which affect her relationships and position within the household. Whereas Rhodaghond's identity hovers between enslavement and service, Zanthia, in *The Knight of Malta*, is identified as an elite female servant and uses this position to her advantage. The chaos Zanthia incites is shrouded in discourses of blackness, as her skin colour is linked to her immoral actions, and it is within these discourses that hierarchies of alterity are intensified. This chapter explored how discourses of colour seek to differentiate the elite Black female servant from her white mistress to establish social hierarchies of order, and concludes with the claim that discourses of blackness and of whiteness are coarticulated in elite female service relationships not only to set the mistress and servant apart, but also to draw

attention to similarities between them. Playwrights bring together anxieties of blackness with anxieties about elite female servants to highlight the threat of the stranger within, thus mobilising concerns of kinship. Analysing Zanche's close proximity to the household, and more specifically to both Vittoria and Flaminio in *The White Devil*, draws attention to how her position challenges the virility of white hegemony. In early modern drama, elite Black female servants are conceptualised as both household insiders (because of their service position) and as cultural outsiders (because of their skin colour and non-kin status). Identified within binaries, this dual status complicates relationships within the household. It is the visibility of Zanche's interracial relationship with Flaminio which incites household chaos, as their potential marriage would supposedly taint the preservation of the household's pure, white bloodline; however, as I have shown, it is ultimately the disorder that occurs among blood kin that terminates the familial lineage. Locating Black female servants within a wider economy of service – and specifically elite service – underscores how intersections of social constructions of identity, such as that between race and status, complicate a character's position within dramatisations of the early modern English social world.

In this thesis's final chapter, I looked to Emilia in *Othello* and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* to demonstrate how drawing connections between early modern plays by way of women performing acts of service can shape our understanding of how service identities and power dynamics function within the early modern social world. Neither Emilia nor Paulina fit the mold of an elite female servant precisely because they are married women. Recognising their anomalous status can change how we read and perform these characters. Whereas Paulina's elite status enables her to perform such extraordinary acts of service on her own accord, Emilia's lower status hinders her. Emilia, I have argued, is not an elite woman and her failure to perform

good and loyal service is ultimately shaped by her social status. Furthermore, in both plays, the women actively challenge male authority; what becomes clear is how their success (or lack thereof) derives from their social position. Both Paulina's and Emilia's actions overstep their social position and thereby undermine patriarchal authority: they are both punished for this as the plays reassert the need for clear social hierarchies of order. Placing Emilia in dialogue with Paulina further enhances our understanding of the impact social status has on a character's actions, encouraging new readings which recognise the ways in which service and status are intertwined in early modern drama.

This thesis has sought to reimagine the narratives and significance of elite female servants within both early modern drama and scholarship, arguing for the elite status of these characters and their transformative roles within the drama of the period. Understanding the institution of service in early modern England – particularly its historical and social purpose – and the terminology and stratifications attached to female service, encourages us to reconsider how service and servant characters are performed on the early modern stage. The ancillary position of these characters as servants, and their authoritative position as elite women, complicates the very nature of social ordering that early modern society worked so hard to establish. Attending to the identity of these elite female servant characters by recognising the part that their gender, sexuality, race, and social status plays in defining their identity in service underscores the agency these characters wielded, both as they shaped their own narrative and as they changed the course of the plays that gave them life. On one level, this thesis has argued that reading female servant characters through the perspective of social status helps us to understand tensions that existed within social and household hierarchies, and how these are depicted on the early modern stage. More broadly,

as this thesis has demonstrated, if we do not consider a character's social place, we risk misunderstanding their positionality within the household and within the narrative. This misunderstanding, as I have shown, has a greater effect, not only in criticism but also in how these characters are perceived in both performance and in printed editions. Beyond this thesis, it is crucial for future work to recognise how social status intersects with social constructions of identity, for doing so encourages us to reimagine how status, gender, race, sexuality, and service operated in early modern English society.

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