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‘*Shrill cryings*’ and ‘*often dyings*’: Wedding Night Tragedy on the Renaissance Stage

PhD

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Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

I argue in this dissertation that tragic and tragicomic plots centred on the wedding night were a major convention on the English Renaissance stage. Previous scholarship has identified 'broken nuptials' in Shakespeare and 'subverted wedding nights' in Beaumont and Fletcher, but these scenarios have not been addressed as part of a wider convention. I contend that almost every dramatist of the era, working individually or in collaboration, utilised 'tragic wedding' designs. Whilst they drew upon various precedents, particularly from the classical period, their dramaturgical focus on the wedding night was highly distinctive. My thesis highlights the employment of 'delayed consummation' structures – familiar from romance and comedy – to a tragic end; I also consider 'displaced consummations' in which the bridal chamber is subject to the incursion of revengers or rivals, often leading to rape, murder or martyrdom. 'Wedding night tragedy' takes shape in the Elizabethan era and becomes a recognizable sub-genre by the Caroline period. The subverted transition rites lead, I suggest, to fluctuations in sexual identity, as a range of competing discourses on marriage and eros are sounded. The prevailing matrimonial idealism of the age is challenged by residual patristic doctrine or emergent libertine ideology. The dominant discourse tends to win out, I maintain, even in tragic defeat, but moral absolutism is frequently shaken. The wedding night focus was accompanied by major mimetic breakthroughs, as dramatists developed symbolic means by which to suggest the consummation, and depicted the marital bedchamber for the first time. Scenes of unprecedented intimacy were staged, often to unnerving or sensational dramatic effect. I exemplify my arguments with detailed discussions of a range of texts, from famous plays such as *Othello* and *The Changeling*, to less familiar (but often vital) works such as *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* and *Sophonisba*.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Tragic Wedding

My thesis is that the subverted wedding night became a major tragic (and tragicomic) convention on the English Renaissance stage, one that has gone largely unaddressed beyond its occurrence in a handful of famous works. Weddings in early modern drama tend to be associated with the happy end of romantic comedy, the collective festivities before a move offstage to the bridal chamber – to what Stephen Greenblatt calls the 'unrepresented consummations of unrepresented marriages'.[1] The second part of Greenblatt's phrase refers, I take it, to the church service, which seems never to have been fully represented, perhaps due to sensitivities over abuse of the Prayer Book.[2] Yet Thomas Heywood, writing in 1624, lists marriage amongst a number of musty ploys used 'to bombast out a play',[3] and in fact almost every element of the wedding day is to be found in the drama of the era. We see the waking of the bride, the bridal procession, the entrance to and emergence from the chapel, wedding banquets, and nuptial entertainments such as masques and plays. There are also dumbshow solemnities led by priests, examples of handfasting or self-knotted unions, and numerous instances of betrothal by ring or gift exchange, which for some at the time meant that a marriage had been formed. But what of the wedding night? The consummation itself could not, of course, be dramatized, for obvious reasons of decorum. Yet various dramaturgical strategies are employed, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, to foreground the sexual rites of marriage on the English Renaissance stage, particularly where those rites are tragically disrupted.

Some conventions that concern the wedding night, such as the bed-trick, have attracted critical attention,[4] but others remain less familiar – scenes, for example, that depict the readying of the bride for bed, or the *reveille matin* (post-nuptial waking of

[1] Greenblatt 1988: 89.
[2] Bevington 1984: 142 suggests that this accounts for a general absence of Christian ceremony on stage.
[3] Prologue to *The English Traveller*.
[4] See Desens 1994 and Doniger 2000. The majority of Renaissance bed-tricks have a nuptial setting.

the couple). Whilst I consider such scenes in the course of this study, my main focus is on the structural and semiotic means by which the nuptial night comes to the fore, in plots that involve a 'delayed consummation', or in staged action that denotes a 'displaced consummation'. In many of the plays the sexual union of bride and groom is postponed or usurped, usually having come under threat from revengers or rivals who would pervert its course. Well-known examples of such dramatic narratives include *Othello*, *The Changeling* and *The Maid's Tragedy*. A securer understanding of these plays is to be obtained, I suggest, from locating them within a wider generic field. Hence I give equal space to some largely unexplored plays in which delayed or displaced consummations serve as the structural hub. Some of these less familiar works – *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* and *Sophonisba*, for example – are of great consequence in the development of a 'tragic wedding' convention in which marriages are contested at the point of erotic union.

My aim is to provide an intertheatrical case study, tracing the development of a 'tragic wedding' convention. The works I discuss have been categorised in a variety of ways: revenge tragedy, romantic or love tragedy, sex tragedy, domestic tragedy, pathetic tragedy (melodrama), and Italianate intrigue tragedy. A number of plays would sit comfortably within several or even all of these categories. I adopt 'wedding night tragedy' as a generic handle, sharing the view of Alistair Fowler that 'variety of description and evaluation' is welcome with regard to literary family resemblances.[5] Louise Clubb, writing on Italian Renaissance drama, points to a range of 'accumulated stage-structures, or theatergrams' at the heart of professional dramaturgy, a 'common fund of theatrical coin', or 'a pool of exchangeable parts and practices, the unpublished common property of playwrights and actors'.[6] The 'tragic wedding' (or 'fatal marriage') convention can be viewed as one such theatregram. It occurs, as I discuss below, in neoclassical Italian drama, but became more of a mainstay in England, where tragedy loomed larger in the populist repertory. Almost without exception, London dramatists explored a range of desires, both licit and illicit, within nuptial scenarios. Whilst I devote chapters to playwrights who persistently invent or utilise 'tragic wedding' plot and motifs – Shakespeare, Marston, and Beaumont and Fletcher – my concern is to address autonomous artistry within a

[5] Fowler 1982: 25.
[6] Clubb 1989: 5; 2010: 6-7.

collective theatrical enterprise, one in which playwrights often influenced or collaborated with one another. Highlighting innovation, continuity and variation, I argue that the 'tragic wedding' convention evolves into a distinctive sub-genre – 'wedding night tragedy' – by the Caroline period. Playwrights and theatrical companies recognised and exploited this as a hit constructional formula.

In temporal terms, wedding nights often acquire a rather elastic quality on the Renaissance stage, subject as they are to frequent postponements and interruptions. The 'delayed consummation' is the key structural blueprint I examine, alongside the rhetorical, tropological and semiotic features that characterise the theatregram. Whilst there is a taxonomic aspect to this, I am concerned less with classification as an end in itself than with gaining an interpretive purchase on particular plays. As Fowler puts it, 'We identify the genre to interpret the exemplar'.[7] I aim for an historically-informed formalism, drawing on the work of various historians – social, cultural and theatrical – in an attempt to offer nuanced close readings while trying 'to keep multiple planes of a culture in view'.[8] I consider the relationship of dramatic form to meaning and affect in the playhouses. The structural displacements are often designed to bring erotic alternatives, both normative and transgressive, into meaningful juxtaposition. As Nigel Smith observes, 'genre is to do with identity, and the play of identities within the dynamics of a society'.[9] The bridal chamber becomes a crucible for the testing of early modern desires and doctrines. This is not to say that I am solely concerned with the original reception of the plays; the nuptial tragedies of the English Renaissance still have much to say to us, as playgoers and readers, about love, sex and marriage.

Weddings have always been a site for narrative twists and upsets, which is hardly surprising, given the traditional blend of solemn ceremony and bacchanalian excess; the sense of irrevocability in making vows with multiple social, familial and legal consequences; and the heightened feelings of the bride and groom, whether of anticipation or anxiety, at the crossing of thresholds both public and private. Self and society meet, and sometimes clash, at the bridal-chamber threshold, and the play of

[7] Fowler 1982: 38.
[8] Bruster 2003: xvii.
[9] Smith 1994: 4.

sexual identities at this point is one of my chief concerns. Transition rites exist in all societies to help ensure a safe passage from one major stage in the life-cycle to the next, and the vulnerability that often accompanies or accounts for such rites of passage has been elucidated in various anthropological studies. These studies informed a major interest in 'maimed rites' in late twentieth-century studies of Renaissance drama. 'In tragedy', according to Naomi Liebler, 'ritual is always present in a perverted, inverted, or aborted form'.[10] There is much to support this claim in early modern staging of marriage ritual: breaches of decorum are frequent, often sensationally so. Numerous playwrights follow Kyd's example in *The Spanish Tragedy* by turning a wedding entertainment into an occasion for violent revenge. These macabre spectacles have not escaped critical attention,[11] but my study reveals that disturbances to the wedding *night* should be recognised as no less significant or prevalent.

The phrases in my title, '*shrill cryings*' and '*often-dyings*', come from an epithalamic song in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* which stands within the tradition of fescennine humour, or licensed bawdy, relating to the sexual union. According to Virginia Tufte, wanton jests were felt to 'ward off the evil to which man is most susceptible in time of good fortune'.[12] The lyric, which I discuss further in Chapter 6, is offered as a blessing on the marriage at hand, but as the play progresses it turns to a curse. In her study of wedding poetry, Tufte points to an alternative, 'anti-epithalamic' tradition in which rites are inverted, evil is summoned rather than expelled, and 'propitious signs and emblems are reversed to presage disunion'.[13] Tufte perhaps underestimates the strength of these inversions as they relate to drama, suggesting that the epithalamium's 'associations with comedy have been far more numerous and extensive than those with tragedy'.[14] In my view, it is a close run thing. My own preferred term for this convention is the 'tragic wedding', following the classical scholar, Richard Seaford, whose essay on this theme highlights various 'profoundly anomic' failures to complete the transition into married life in Greek

[10] Liebler 1995: 27. See the introductions to Garber 1981 and Woodbridge and Berry 1992 on the anthropological background.
[11] See, for example, McAlindon 1986: 41-48 on 'the Treacherous Entertainment'.
[12] Tufte 1970: 23.
[13] Tufte 1970: 257 – and Chap. III. Tufte has misgivings about the label 'anti-epithalamic' and indeed it could be seen as misleading if the works were thus seen as anti-*marriage*: in most cases it is a matter of dismay or horror when nuptial rites are inverted.
[14] Tufte 1970: 256.

tragedy.[15] The work of Seaford and other classicists has been a significant spur to my study. Rush Rehm, for example, focuses on parallels between wedding and funeral rites in Attic culture, and suggests that the marriage-to-death paradigm 'receives an early, powerful instantiation in Greek tragedy'; Helene Foley observes the 'continued perversion and inversion' of rites relating to a bride's transferal from the natal to the marital household; for Sheila Murnaghan, marriage is an inevitable subject of tragedy as 'a key social institution in which private desires and the interests of the polis intersect'.[16] These studies are rich in historical specificity, but the general principles they delineate are often close to those that underpin Renaissance tragedy. I discuss some classical precedents in which marriage formation is the fulcrum of a tragic action later in this chapter.

Early modern scholars have also drawn attention to certain generic features of great relevance to my study. A significant number of plays involve what Leo Salingar terms 'broken nuptials'.[17] Salingar's primary concern is the frequent nuptial disturbance in Shakespearean comedy, but the phrase could apply equally to works by a variety of authors working within a range of theatrical genres. Another critic to address a 'Fatal Wedding or Deadly Nuptial' convention is Roger Stilling, though he points more to disturbed ceremony than to tragic incursions on the nuptial chamber. That said, Stilling does note the vengeful substitution of 'a death act for a love act' in the drama of the era, suggesting that the love-death opposition stands as 'a single unifying motif… running through and linking the major works'.[18] Similar claims are made by Charles Forker, for whom a 'love-death nexus' is at the heart of early seventeenth-century tragedy, reflecting 'something of a cultural obsession'; and by Michael Neill, who writes of 'the intimate association of sexuality and death so characteristic of the period's erotic imagination'.[19] I consider the *liebestod* and 'erotic death' tropes in a number of plays. The nuptial dimension of this phenomenon has been recognised in some of the era's most famous works, but the extent to which the 'love-death nexus' is centred specifically on the bridal chamber has not been charted.

[15] Seaford 1987: 106.
[16] Rehm 1994: 4; Foley 2001: 84; Murnaghan 2005: 195.
[17] Salingar 1974: 303. See also Neely 1993.
[18] Stilling 1976: 1, 36.
[19] Forker 1986: 237; Neill 2006a: 173.

This focus on the wedding night on the English stage is, I believe, a highly original dramaturgical development, albeit one rooted in an archetypal 'fatal marriage' narreme. I suggest that a mimetic breakthrough in depicting romantic intimacy is effected by playwrights using the 'tragic wedding' convention. To demonstrate this, I try where possible to address 'how plays work on an imagined audience in the circumstance of an imagined theatrical representation'.[20] Whilst some of the plays have a limited (or non-existent) stage history, the recent boom in early modern playhouse and reception studies is an aid to speculation. Marston's *Sophonisba*, for example, has gone all but unperformed since it first appeared at the Blackfriars theatre, yet its sophisticated use of music, costume and properties has recently been addressed by a number of critics, as I outline in Chapter 4. One of the play's most striking features is its use of the bedchamber as a setting, with the bed as a major prop. Before the seventeenth century, beds were generally used on stage to show the sick or the dying.[21] The marriage bed makes an appearance, however, in some wedding night tragedies, offering what Sasha Roberts calls 'a stage-within-a-stage, an intense and compelling visual and symbolic arena for acting out powerful passions and transgressions'.[22] This stands as a significant representational shift when it comes to depicting private hopes and fears, desires and shames. Plays in which a consummation-under-threat forms the structural axis introduce a new level of romantic and domestic intimacy. Whilst the amorous implications of '*shrill cryings*' and '*often-dyings*' could not be staged *literally*, there was no such restriction when it came to death. In a number of the plays, the bridal bed is linked metaphorically and semiotically to the tomb,[23] and nuptial unions are displaced by acts of revenge or sacrifice, animating the sex-death equation of early modern parlance.

A famous example is found in the 'bedchamber scene' of *Othello* which has been the subject of heated critical debate in recent times. Some take issue with the voyeuristic speculation that surrounds the play, while others argue that it is unavoidable, given

[20] Meisel 2007: 1.
[21] Occasionally there was a daringly romantic or voyeuristic element: a dumb-show in *Gismund of Salerne* (1566) (later *Tancred and Gismund*) shows the clandestine meeting of lovers observed in a bedchamber by the heroine's father; Lyly's *Sappho and Phao* (1584) depicts the lovesick queen keeping to her bed and receiving visits from the lowly object of her intense (if chaste) desire.
[22] Roberts 2002: 153. The comment relates to beds in Shakespeare.
[23] Neill 2006a: 173 notes the totemic link between tester-beds and tester-tombs in the era.

that Shakespeare 'seeds our prurience'.[24] Many of the plays under consideration here invite erotic conjecture, not only with regard to the bride and groom but also to their enemies or rivals. This clearly had an appeal in early modern London: as Jeremy Lopez observes, 'repetition in the commercial theatre is a good index of theatrical success: for a device to become conventional it must be functional and give pleasure'.[25] One of the fascinations, I suggest, was seeing the domestic life of vulnerable or hubristic nobles enacted on stage in unprecedented intimacy. According to Martin Meisel, 'the pleasure of privileged witness' is one of the primal appeals of drama.[26] Meisel picks out the death of Desdemona as a representative example of the phenomenon, whilst acknowledging the paradoxical nature of such 'pleasure' when we are brought into proximity with so terrible an event. By no means all spectators of *Othello*'s tragic denouement have felt themselves 'privileged', as we shall see in Chapter 3, but the scene has a continued capacity to generate strong and often conflicted responses.

My concern with affective structures in this dissertation is not only with sensation, but also with cognition and ideology. Peter Womack, writing about 'theatre's love of travestied ceremony', states that 'dissonances and interruptions are the very sources of meaning'.[27] Playwrights seized upon 'broken nuptial' narratives with good reason (or sound instinct). The finest nuptial tragedies forge a strong link between public and private domains. The wider political world impinges as lovers hope to make, in Donne's words, 'one little room, an everywhere'.[28] The delayed consummation formula is simple, yet it offers multiple scopic and iconographic possibilities, with the bridal chamber as the imaginative and sometimes voyeuristic crux. What Charles Whitney terms a 'liberated aesthetic' is often at work, one that, eschewing didacticism, places the interpretive onus on individual playgoers after collective emotional abandon.[29] Overdetermined action destabilises moral binaries; affective impact is complicated and strengthened by identification with victims and villains alike. The early modern 'theatre of complicity' incorporates 'radical demythologizing

[24] Palfrey 2005: 256.
[25] Lopez 2003: 4.
[26] Meisel 2007: 231-37.
[27] Womack 2006: 56.
[28] 'The Good Morrow' – see Chapter 3 on the post-nuptial implications of this title.
[29] Whitney 2006: 27.

and antinomian trends':[30] we feel for the lovers in their plight, while responding to the dissident energy of threats to a civil order founded on marriage. Plangent intensity gives way to (or coincides with) ironic peripeties; multiple passions and discourses converge, shatter and ramify. As Louis Montrose states, in the drama of the era the dominant ideologies tend to prevail but they are 'never absolute and never uncontested'.[31] Holy wedlock is promoted as a personal and social blessing in many of the plays I consider, but this is never a univocal doctrine: there is no easy separation, say, of lawful love and ungovernable libertine desire. I address the ideological nexus that lies behind the development of 'wedding night tragedy' in my next section, in an attempt to identify why the bridal chamber became such a potent site for enquiry and transformation.

'THAT AMOROUS BATTLE': THE EARLY MODERN WEDDING NIGHT

A great deal of attention has been paid to the theme of marriage on the early modern stage, examining courtship and nuptial rites in their legal, religious and socio-political contexts.[32] Comparatively little has been said, however, about the wedding night, despite its central importance to marriage formation. In this section I attempt to map some of the cultural and ideological terrain that lies behind 'wedding night tragedy'. It will be useful to consider attitudes towards marriage in general and marital sex in particular that might have influenced the expectations of early modern couples on the nuptial night – though the level of any such influence is, of course, unquantifiable. Aside from a few high-profile cases involving royal or aristocratic couples, there is little on the historical record about wedding night intimacy. A few people recorded their sexual successes or failures in letters or diaries; in cases of 'impotence and frigidity', a few sought annulments through the church courts.[33] For the most part, however, there is an understandable silence on how couples became (or attempted to become) 'one flesh'. Marital sexuality was nevertheless widely written about in the period, in ballads and sermons, in jest-books and conduct-books. In what follows, I

[30] Whitney 2006: 28.
[31] Montrose 1996: 122.
[32] See, for example, Rose 1988, Cook 1991, Orlin 1994, Sokol and Sokol 2003.
[33] Ingram 1987: 172 explains that these cases rarely came to court since 'however common such incapacity may have been it was extremely difficult to prove'.

address some of the hopes, anxieties, ideals and scruples that surrounded sex and marriage, accentuating those rhetorical discourses – residual, dominant and emergent – most relevant to the emergence of a 'tragic wedding' theatregram.

Marriage formation in early modern England usually saw the convergence (and sometimes clash) of multiple interests – romantic and erotic, financial and legal, religious and political. It was 'a *rite de passage* of enormous social consequence'.[34] Church and state authorities promoted holy matrimony as an aid to social cohesion and health. Across Europe, in both Protestant and Catholic countries, there was a drive to regulate marriage and suppress illicit sexuality.[35] In England, disputes over marriage formation and sexual reputation formed a large part of the work of church courts.[36] Church doctrine in post-Reformation England held marriage to be an 'honorable estate instituted of God in paradise, in the time of mannes innocencie', with the threefold purpose that 'man and woman should live lawfully in a perpetual friendship, to bring forth fruit, and to avoid fornication'.[37] The household was viewed as a microcosmic commonwealth, the spiritual and practical foundation of wider civil society; brides and grooms crossed the threshold to a new life of intimacy and responsibility.[38] Most weddings were festive occasions, but getting married was also a 'strenuous, often conflicted social, psychological, and economic process'.[39] Couples might face significant pressures at any point in this process, including the wedding night. Some unions provoked not blessings but blame, leading on occasion to charivaris – raucous and sometimes violent protests against marriages perceived to be irregular.[40] The problems could be more private, however, as suggested in George Puttenham's description – in *The Art of English Poesy* – of a bride's post-nuptial emergence from the bedchamber under the scrutiny of her kin, who try to ascertain 'whether she were the same woman or a changeling, or dead or alive, or maimed by any accident nocturnal' (99).[41] As discussed later, Puttenham is purportedly

[34] Ingram 1987: 128.
[35] Ingram 2013: 313-15.
[36] Ingram 1987; Houlbrooke 1979: 75-88.
[37] *The Forme of Solemnization of matrimonie* (1549), 64; *An Homily of the State of Matrimony* (1562), 446.
[38] See Todd 1987: Chap. 4; Cressy 1997: 286-92; Cook 1991: 3-8, 260-1; Shepard 2003: 73-5.
[39] Gillis 1985: 11. See also Cressy 1997: Chaps. 13 and 14, and Dubrow 1990: 5-27.
[40] Ingram 2004; Muir 1997: 98-104.
[41] See the note at the head of the bibliography on parenthetical page references.

promoting marriage here, yet the painful or even tragic potential of the consummation for young virginal brides is apparent.[42]

The early modern period is marked by confusion over the point at which a marriage was formed – did betrothal, solemnization or consummation make a match? There were discrepancies between canon law and civil law and inconsistencies in the application of both.[43] According to the church, consent was the sole requirement to seal a marriage, but from a legal standpoint the transfer of property was made permanent by consummation.[44] The timing and status of the wedding night could be ambiguous. Was it legitimate for a betrothed couple to sleep together, or should they wait until the marriage was solemnized? The church urged the latter course, but many couples chose the former, as attested by the 20 to 30 per cent of brides who bore children within eight months of a church service.[45] In theory, there was nothing illegal or immoral about this if it was backed by a *de praesenti* contract, popularly known as 'handfasting' or 'making sure'. Reformers condemned unsolemnized sexual unions, however, and prosecutions against perceived irregularity and illegitimacy rose in some areas around the turn of the seventeenth century.[46] The issue is reflected in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1604) where Claudio and his pregnant trothplight lover, Juliet, are victims of a moral clampdown. Some historians argue that in the early seventeenth century there was widespread acceptance of church solemnization, 'as people realized the benefits to be had from publicity and the inconveniences from secrecy'.[47] Others suggest, however, that clandestine marriage remained 'extensive and persistent' despite repeated attempts to legislate against it.[48] Uncertainty over nuptial matters in general is reflected in the high number of Renaissance plays involving forced or clandestine marriages, disputes over matrimonial contracts, doubts over virginal purity, the disturbance of wedding rites, and delayed or displaced consummations.

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[42] Puttenham contrasts virgins with widows and what he insinuatingly calls 'well-experienced young women' who have 'no fear of… those terrible approaches' (100).
[43] Such inconsistencies were nothing new – see Kelly 1975: 168-173 on C14 church courts.
[44] Brundage 1987: 235-42, 547; Cook 1991: 165-6, 191-4.
[45] Cressy 1997: 277-8: 'A reasonable guess might be that half the couples who contracted to be married engaged in sexual congress; no more than half were still virgins before their wedding night.'
[46] Ingram 1987: Chap. 7.
[47] Carlson 1994: 140. See also Cressy 1997: Chap. 14; Ingram 1987: Chap. 6.
[48] Outhwaite 1995: 54.

Such elements are found in plays of all genres. A number of romantic comedies of the 1590s depict clandestine elopements, for example, and assert the importance of personal affection in choosing a spouse. The play singled out by Andrew Gurr as most representative of this trend is a romantic tragedy, however – *Romeo and Juliet*. Gurr uses the phrase 'Juliet's rebellion' to designate the rise of romantic self-determination, noting its particular appeal to Inns of Court students who welcomed the challenge to conservative views on love and marriage.[49] The affective impact of Shakespeare's romantic verse and drama in the 1590s is clear. A wave of ardour is recorded by John Weever in a 1599 epigram: 'They burn in love thy children *Shakespear*'.[50] John Marston paints a satirical portrait of Luscus who speaks 'Naught but pure *Juliat* and *Romio*' and quotes from 'some new pathetique Tragedie' as a wooing strategy.[51] Yet Marston himself created a fatal marriage plot for his own tale of forbidden love in the face of parental tyranny in the Antonio plays (1600-01). The dramatic narratives are extreme but they mirror genuine tensions between some parents and their offspring in the era. The most common reason given in church courts for clandestine marriage was the withholding of parental approval; frustrated marriage plans were a common cause of mental illness and suicide.[52] *Romeo and Juliet* concludes with the *liebestod* of the thwarted lovers, though not before they become 'one flesh' on their sole night together. Other *inamorata* never reach this point: in Sampson's *The Vow Breaker* (c.1627) and the anonymous *The Fatal Marriage* (c.1621) suicides occur on the wedding night itself, in protest against breach of promise or forced marriage. The titles (or sub-titles) of other plays such as *The Broken Contract, The Fatal Union* and *The Fatal Contract* reflect the wider trend, as playwrights came to understand the emotive appeal of contested nuptials.

The plays I consider are not solely concerned with passionate private feelings or familial interests. The actions usually have a wider civic or political dimension too. Royal marriages are frequently depicted, with matters of national or international consequence hanging on the union. Whilst the scenarios are often sensational, they reflect the actual importance of dynastic marriage in the era. Marriage was used to promote peace and stability in a hazardous world. The union between Henry VII and

[49] Gurr 2004: 180.
[50] Quoted in Whitney 2006: 133-4.
[51] *The Scourge of Villainie* XI.39, 48.
[52] Ingram 1987: 59; see also Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* Vol III, 234 on love-related suicides.

Elizabeth of York was designed, for example, to reconcile opposing factions following the Wars of the Roses. Such plans could backfire, however. The marriage of Henry of Navarre and Margaret of Valois in 1572 was meant to ease tensions between Protestants and Catholics but instead it triggered the St Bartholemew's Day massacre. 'Oh fatall was this marriage to us all' (3.37) is a line from Marlowe's play on the subject, *The Massacre at Paris*. John Stubbs calls it 'that infamous marriage to the end of the world' (40) in *The Gaping Gulf* (1579), a polemic prompted by the marriage negotiations of Elizabeth I (Protestant) and the Duke of Anjou (Catholic).[53] Stubbs warns of dire consequences for the nation should the exogamous match proceed, suggesting that the queen risked becoming 'a doleful bride in their bloody bride chambers' (41). The right hands of Stubbs and his publisher were chopped off as a punishment for sedition. The matrimonial brokerage of James I also caused feelings to run high, especially with regard to a proposed 'Spanish Match' for Prince Charles. Protesters were more cautious than Stubbs, issuing anonymous verse libels, or dissenting on stage through the use of 'inexact analogy for the purposes of deniability', as Middleton and Rowley seem to have done in *The Changeling*.[54] Concern and curiosity over dynastic or aristocratic marriage is persistently reflected in the playhouses, in tragic actions often centred on the wedding night and 'bloody bride chambers'.

A number of nuptial tragedies focus on the consummation. Again, this is repeatedly linked to political powerplay. A dispute over consummation was at the heart of England's most famous matrimonial controversy, the annulment of Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. The prolonged legal arguments concerned whether Catherine's first marriage to Henry's brother, Arthur, had ever been consummated. When the court ruled that it had been – indeterminacy not being an option – the political and religious consequences were seismic.[55] Shakespeare and Fletcher are discreet about such matters in *Henry VIII*, perhaps because the matrimonial legacy of the Tudors was still a live issue with regard to royal legitimacy. James I's harsh response to the clandestine marriage in 1610 of Arbella Stuart is evidence of such

[53] Stubbs dismisses Anjou's Protestant sympathies.
[54] Patterson 2007: 1635. See also the 'Early Stuart Libels' website.
[55] See Kelly 1976; see also Warnicke 2000 on the political fallout of Henry's unconsummated marriage to Anne of Cleves.

sensitivities.[56] James was known both for expedient match-making and for intrusive attempts to verify the consummation in the marriages he arranged, including that of his daughter, Elizabeth. The king's behaviour might be viewed as political rather than prurient, reflecting patrilineal concerns over validity, but it was seen by some as 'hovering on the cusp of indecency'.[57] Sexual unions in elite marriages sometimes became the subject of salacious gossip, as in the infamous case of Frances Howard and Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, where an annulment was granted on grounds of non-consummation.[58] Francis Osborne's scabrous Interregnum-era *The True Tragicomedy*, recalls the scandal, and gives a flavour of the misogynous conjectures; it contains a post-nuptial scene in which a wanton Frances Howard complains of her husband's inability to 'violate the chastity of a she-flea' or to mount 'to gather the lowest fruits of marriage' (1.4.17-18, 86-7). The virginity test of *The Changeling* and the impotence plot of Middleton's *The Witch* may well draw on the scandal too. Lovers become pawns in wedding night power games in plays from Peele's (?) *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* (c.1594) to Harding's *Sicily and Naples, or The Fatal Union* (1640). The theme of nuptial impotence is found in works such as Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* and Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger's *Thierry and Theodoret.* Integral to these plays is a sense that the events – or non-events – of the wedding night could have major social and political as well as personal and familial ramifications.

Erotic expectations of the wedding night (and marriage in general) are voiced and contested in many plays. These expectations were shaped in part by centuries of ecclesiastical jurisdiction over marriage and sexuality. The Christian hermeneutic tradition had long struggled to reconcile conflicting scriptural messages about sex, especially those found in Genesis.[59] According to ascetic exegesis that emerged in late antiquity, the act of intercourse had no place in Eden and could not be performed without sin, being a consequence of the Fall; other patristic thinkers held, however, that the nuptial bond instituted in Eden for procreative purposes meant that Adam and

[56] See Gristwood 2003.
[57] Rickman 2008: 73; see also Robbins 2008: 176-7. Warnicke 2000: 161-2 gives other examples of nuptial scrutiny, relating Charles I's determination to keep prying eyes from his nuptial chamber.
[58] See Lindley 1993. Potter 1983: xx-xxiii gives a useful summary.
[59] Payer 1993: Chaps. 1 and 2; Turner 1993: Chaps. 1 and 2.

Eve were sexual beings, and that marriage redeemed our fallen sexuality.[60] Matrimony came to be viewed as a sacrament, but the Pauline view (outlined in 1 Corinthians 7) that virgins and celibates were closer to God prevailed in the medieval church. For Thomas Aquinas, virginity – 'the complete immunity from sexual pleasure' – was perfection.[61] The spiritual hierarchy is demonstrated in a thirteenth century Notre Dame 'miracle' which concerns a youth who falls in love with, and dedicates himself to, a statue of the Virgin Mary.[62] He forgets his promise, however, and decides to marry – only to prove impotent on the wedding night. The statue of Mary comes to life and appears in the bridal bed to admonish the bridegroom who leaps up in terror and runs to join a monastery. Nuptial *non*-consummation – what Peter Brown calls 'the classic ascetic scenario of sexual renunciation on the wedding night' – is also given the seal of approval in various saints' lives, such as that of St. Cecilia recounted in Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale*.[63] Whilst marriage was encouraged for the less pure who could not control their carnal impulses, canonists issued stern warnings over immoderate desire. The biblical Tobias was held up as a model of nuptial temperance.[64] Chaucer's Parson declares married sex 'oonly for amorous love' a 'deedly synne' (942) – a view maintained by some into the early modern era of reform.[65] Other figures in Chaucer, such as the Wife of Bath, take issue with these stringent teachings. Liberal theologians argued that indulgence in marital sex for pleasure was a venial rather than a mortal sin, perhaps sensing that a too rigorous approach would alienate many lay persons.[66] Moderate views seem to have gained ground through the middle ages,[67] but a major ideological shift only arrived with the rise of humanism, a movement which saw the propagandist privileging of marriage over virginity.

Humanist rhetoric is vital to much of the drama under study here. The resurgent matrimonial idealism of the age is examined in Anthony D'Elia's *The Renaissance of*

[60] See Brown 1988.
[61] Quoted in Payer 1993: 159.
[62] Recounted in Warner 1985: 230-1.
[63] Brown 1988: 98.
[64] Kelly 1975: 259, 275-8; Brooke 1989: 43, 194n52.
[65] Greenblatt 1980: 246-50.
[66] Kelly 1975: 261. See also Parish 2010 on clerical concubinage, an issue which laid the church open to ridicule and charges of hypocrisy.
[67] Brundage 1987: 364-67, 415, 447-53, 503-9 gives comprehensive evidence but also notes that there was no doctrinal consensus. See also Kelly 1975: Chaps. 11-12.

Marriage in Fifteenth-century Italy. Drawing on Greco-Roman moral philosophy, humanists 'constructed a coherent set of ideals of which marriage was at the center'.[68] It was in the interests of Italian city-states, severely depleted by plague and war, to promote marriage and reproduction ahead of celibacy. Many advocated an active civic and familial life ahead of contemplative retreat, with some viewing celibacy as unnatural or even unholy. Anticlerical humanists created 'elaborate philosophical defenses of marriage, women, and sexual pleasure', making of connubial love an 'exalted ideal' (137). Some humanists remained close to church teaching on marital sex, emphasising its procreative function whilst recommending modesty and moderation.[69] Others were less restrained, however, viewing sex as not only natural but also essential to human happiness. D'Elia shows how humanist wedding oratory was crucial in promoting 'the joys of licit sexuality' and presenting 'marriage as a way to transform lust into legitimate pleasure'; orators revived classical epithalamic motifs, drawing on 'the ancient erotic purpose of the genre', looking to 'excite groom and bride to the sensual pleasure of the wedding night'.[70] The arguments were often secular, more concerned with populating the human *polis* than the City of God. That said, the promotion of fertile marriage sometimes had a hierogamous aspect, with erotic union seen as ensuring cosmic harmony;[71] a mix of Christian and neo-platonic tropes were employed to present marriage as a ladder to heaven. The rhetorical means by which these new views were disseminated proved highly influential. They are echoed in Erasmus's controversial *Encomium matrimonii*,[72] which argues that human immortality is gained through procreative marriage, and that copulation is entirely natural, virginity being for angels not men. Humanist writers in England followed suit, producing pro-matrimonial colloquies that looked to 'blazon the blessinges and excellencie of this sacred Institution'.[73]

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[68] D'Elia 2004: 83.
[69] Eg. Barbaro's 'On Wifely Duties' (1415).
[70] D'Elia 2004: 100, 39, 105. The Greek word *epithalamion* means upon (*epi*) the bedchamber (*thalamos*).
[71] See D'Elia 2004: 42, Tufte 1970: 130-132 and Dubrow 1990: 40-42 on the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) in Renaissance marriage rhetoric.
[72] Published 1518, but written some twenty years earlier: see Sowards 1985: 528-9. It was placed on a list of banned works by the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent. See D'Elia 2004: 131-33 and Todd 1987: 21-27, 99-101 on the influence of Erasmus on Protestantism.
[73] Whetstone, *An Heptameron of Civill Discourses* (1582), 202. See also Tilney's *The Flower of Friendship* (1568).

Laudatory speeches at elite Italian weddings led in turn to a revival of verse epithalamia, a genre which brings us closer to the performance of matrimonial discourses on the English stage. Again, there was a notable focus on the consummation. Mostly this focus was tacit or decorous, but some poets went beyond the fescinnine licence of their main model, Catullus, by bringing 'elements of the *Ars Amatoria* into the Renaissance epithalamium'.[74] In the verses of Pontano (in Italy) and Secundus (in Holland), grooms are urged to conquest in amatory battle, licit unions carry an illicit erotic charge, and 'description of the bridal night… becomes the central concern'.[75] Puttenham recommends Secundus as a model in his discussion of wedding verse in *The Art of English Poesy* (1589). In a work dedicated to Elizabeth I,[76] he asks the pardon of 'chaste and honourable ears' before explaining that one purpose of ancient epithalamia was to cover, by means of 'loud and shrill' singing, the 'screaking and outcry of the young damsel feeling the first forces of her stiff and rigorous young man' (97-8). Whilst English epithalamists largely eschewed overt eroticism,[77] they nevertheless drew significant attention to the wedding night. There were many variations on the theme of 'that amorous battle' in which, as Puttenham puts it, newlyweds 'desire one to vanquish the other by such friendly conflicts' (98-9).[78] In 'A Hymne to Hymen', produced for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine in 1613, George Chapman writes of 'the nuptial battle's joys', and of 'Love-scorch't Virgines' who long to be 'taken ravish't up, in *Hymens* armes' (17, 21, 76). John Donne, in his Valentine's Day epithalamion for the same wedding, takes similar licence: an image of the groom passing 'through sphere after sphere:/ First her sheets, then her arms, then anywhere' (81-2) echoes the sexual discoveries of Donne's 'Elegy 19'. The royal lovers 'quickly pay their debt, and then/ Take no acquittances, but pay again', making the most of 'such occasion to be liberal' (93-6). Invoking the spirit of 'antiquity' (69), Donne sounds the rhetoric of conjugal desire in the Stuart court, with no apologies to 'chaste and honourable ears'.

Many playwrights drew upon and contributed to the burgeoning nuptial discourse. Hymen is honoured with a 'wedlock-hymn' in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (5.4.137);

[74] Forster 1969: 110.
[75] Tufte 1970: 92.
[76] Ostensibly, at least – May 2008: 161-5 discusses Puttenham's lack of court experience or status.
[77] Dubrow 1990: 30-1, 48-9.
[78] Dubrow 1990: 86-88 considers martial metaphors in wedding verse.

Middleton provides a defence of 'Reverend and honourable matrimony' in *The Phoenix* (8.166); Marston writes a paean to the 'sweets of marriage' in *The Fawn* (5.13). The latter is offered as a blessing on an offstage consummation: 'You fruitful well-mixed heats, O, bless the sheets/ Of yonder chamber' (5.6-7). In Chapman's *The Gentleman Usher*, clandestine lovers marry themselves 'from this hour to eternity' (4.2.180), their vows founded on devotional eroticism:

> And as I knit it, here I vow by heaven;
> By the most sweet imaginary joys
> Of untried nuptials; by love's ushering fire,
> Fore-melting beauty, and love's flame itself 4.2.154-7.

In Massinger's *The Duke of Milan*, the wedding night is retrospectively lauded as a site of cosmic benevolence: 'Blest night… in which a blessing/ Was by the full consent of all the Starrs,/ Confer'd upon mankind' (1.3.47-51). The uxorious Duke revels in sustained hymeneal joys – 'No night to mee,/ But is a brydall one' (42-3) – though the idolatrous nature of his love is exposed in the ensuing tragedy.

Encomiums to marriage are common in Stuart wedding masques.[79] In Jonson's *Hymenaei*, marriage 'Contracts the world in one…/ Is spring and end of all things' (120-1). The poet urges a fruitful consummation in which the lovers hasten 'To their perfection', at once passionate and temperate, indulging in 'all the joys/ And melting toys/ That chaster love allows' (237-9, 505). The notion of gaining perfection through nuptial concupiscence inverts the doctrine of celibacy. Jonson's purpose in braiding spiritual and erotic aspiration is to prove 'That the most honoured state of man and wife/ Doth far exceed th'insociate virgin-life' (618-19). The masque was performed at court for the Essex-Howard wedding. King James and Queen Anne are addressed as match-making gods, who know how marriage 'binds/ The fighting seeds of things' (79-80) – an image that simultaneously suggests the 'amorous battle' of consummation, the subduing of political faction, and the establishment of universal

[79] Dubrow 1990: 122-4 discusses the affinity between the epithalamium and masque.

order.[80] The fact that the ill-fated union proved unconsummated shows how hard it was for some couples to live up to such hyperbolical topoi.[81]

The epithalamic tradition has always recognised impediments to marriage, both internal and external, only for most of the doubts or threats to be expelled. The 'banishing-of-dangers motif', as Dubrow terms it,[82] has an apotropaic or prophylactic function. But the banished demons tend to congregate elsewhere, finding a home in other genres. Violated bonds and ceremonies are at the heart of tragic drama. 'Broken nuptials' came to the fore on the late Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, the dramatic convention mirroring the rise of the English epithalamium and wedding masque, offering a dark and distorted reflection. In nuptial tragedy, threats to and fears about marriage are given full rein. Standard tropes such as the amorous battle and the sacrifice of virginity are horribly actualised. Connubial idealism looms large in many plays – especially those such as *Sophonisba* and *The Maid's Tragedy* which dramatise contests between rightful and wrongful matches – but the vulnerability of rites and rhetoric to subversion is often exposed.

The dramaturgical treatment of the wedding night was also influenced by the rhetoric of Protestantism, a movement in which matrimonial idealism was again fundamental. The right of priests to marry was a central tenet of the reformed church. For Luther and others, marriage was an integral part of the divine scheme; the ascetic repression of natural drives led, by and large, not to holiness but to depravity and hypocrisy. The chaste and fruitful wife was valorised ahead of the virgin. These arguments were not new but they took on a polemical urgency in the sixteenth century.[83] Where humanists drew primarily on ancient moral philosophy and rhetoric, Protestants depended on scriptural exegesis.[84] Paul may have extolled virginity but another epistle in his name held that 'Marriage *is* honourable in all, and the bed undefiled'.[85] References to the

[80] The match was meant to unite opposing factions at court. The image of warring seeds or elements (a primal chaos both creative and destructive) is found in classical poets such as Lucretius and Ovid.
[81] The delay was deliberate at first, given the youth of the pair, but it became infamously prolonged. Jonson expunged references to Essex and Howard for the 1616 Folio, aiming to free the idealistic message – and his own poetic legacy – from scandalous taint. See Lindley 1986.
[82] Dubrow 1990: Index, under 'Lyric epithalamium', and 78-84.
[83] Luther's own marriage to a nun 'opened the floodgates in the debate on clerical marriage' – Parish 2000: 235. See also Parish 2010: Chaps. 4 and 5.
[84] Parish 2000: Chap. 2.
[85] Hebrews 13.4 – attributed to Paul in the Authorized Version (though long understood not to be his).

institution of marriage in Eden were ubiquitous. As Philip Almond remarks, 'The Protestant understanding of marriage as a paradisal institution was an important part of anti-Catholic rhetoric'.[86] Luther, according to James Grantham Turner, found 'in married sexuality the most vivid evidence, the least diminished trace, of Paradisal bliss'.[87] On the stage, liturgical rhetoric generally plays second fiddle to that of classically-inflected humanism, but the prospect of paradisal marriage is often raised. In nuptial tragedies such as *Othello* and *The Changeling*, this usually serves as a cue for the serpent to enter the garden.

The marriage bed, so important to the drama of the era, is prominent in Protestant discourse.[88] The poet and clergyman, Robert Herrick, envisioned an eroticised rural paradise centred on 'sheets, that know no sin' (40) in 'A Country life', a verse epistle to his brother. The latter's chief joy lies, it is suggested, in the purity and sexual willingness of a wife who 'by chast intentions led,/ Gives thee each night a Maidenhead' (41-2). The notion of perpetually reliving the nuptial night – of virginity endlessly relinquished and replenished – is voiced again in 'Julia's *Churching*':

> *She who keeps chastly to her husbands side*
> *Is not for one, but every night his Bride:*
> *And stealing still with love, and feare to Bed,*
> *Brings him not one, but many a Maiden-head.* 13-16

Whilst Herrick emphasises erotic plenitude, most Protestant divines continued to warn against excessive sensual indulgence within marriage.[89] The *Book of Common Prayer* admonished those who married merely to satisfy carnal appetites. There was fierce condemnation of radical sects who used scriptural authority to justify bigamy or polygamy.[90] In general, however, the idea that marital sex must be procreative to be without sin was rejected. Its main purpose was to foster a lasting spousal fellowship. Some clergymen, such as the moderate Puritan, Richard Greenham, saw sexual compatibility as a mark of spiritual sanction: 'One may know whether his wife be brought unto him of the Lord… when they desire mutually to do the duties which they

[86] Almond 1999: 160.
[87] Turner 1993: 6-7.
[88] One obvious exception is Elizabeth I, though she variously figures as a fertile goddess and as a wife to the nation as well as a virgin.
[89] Turner 1993: 60-62; Dubrow 1990: 17-18; Foyster 1999: 75-77; Brundage 1987: 255-57.
[90] Turner 1993: 80-92; Almond 1999: 168-172.

owe one unto another'.[91] Marriage was no longer considered a sacrament, but for some the wedding night was a moment of truth both fleshly and godly.

Reading Greenham and Herrick, we might wonder who the connubial Eden is for. Male sexual satisfaction seems of primary concern, though mutual love or desire is acknowledged. The reciprocal notion of 'due benevolence' (1 Corinthians 7.3) is often raised in marriage manuals.[92] A widespread medical belief held that female sexual pleasure was necessary for conception to occur.[93] Numerous plays address erotic expectations of marriage for both sexes, with many heroines conforming to 'the figure of the desired and desiring bride' of romance tradition.[94] Some playwrights focus on female anticipation of the wedding night; the epithalamic soliloquy of Shakespeare's Juliet is a breakthrough in the (male-authored) articulation of female desire.[95] The stage was set for a wave of what Marston terms 'modest amorousness' (*The Fawn*: 3.520). Juliet's hopes are voiced, though, even as Romeo is drawn into a deadly fight with her cousin, Tybalt. Structural and verbal ironies abound as playwrights divert nuptial rites and discourses to tragic ends. Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*, for example, is far from the conventional blushing bride alluded to in the wedding banter: ''Tis ever the bride's fashion towards bed-time/ To set light by her joys, as if she owed 'em not' (4.1.68-9).[96] The notion of an ambivalent bride who both welcomes and mourns defloration has ancient roots.[97] It is with a blend of 'love' and 'fear' that Herrick's Julia perpetually steals to bed, wifely-virginal; the 'bride-habited,/ But maiden-hearted' Emilia of Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsman* is highly ambivalent about wedlock (5.1.150-1). In some cases an outright aversion is expressed, especially in plays that deal with forced marriage. Many, like Shakespeare's Anne Page, make their own clandestine choice of husband, shunning the 'thousand irreligious cursed hours' of loathsome conjugal duty in an arranged match.[98] The unhappily married Penthea in Ford's *The Broken Heart* treats such duty as both a spiritual crime and a rape. She bequeaths her youth to 'virgin wives' and

[91] Quoted in Orlin 1994: 178. See Carlson 1994: 65 esp. n173 on Greenham's acute awareness of (and, it seems, struggles with) the concupiscible passions.
[92] Dubrow 1990: 24-26, 88-89.
[93] Kassell 2013: 64-5; Foyster 1999: 69-70.
[94] Cooper 1996: 28.
[95] *Romeo and Juliet* Act 3.2.1-31. See Bly 2001 on the influence of Juliet's desire.
[96] Cf. Webster, *The White Devil* 4.3.144-50 on modesty as a cover for secret desire.
[97] Eg. in the epithalamia of Sappho and Catullus (esp. 62). See also Seaford 1987.
[98] *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 5.5.230.

'married maids' (3.5.52, 56). The former are those (like Herrick's Julia) whose chaste sexual love sustains or renews their virginal integrity; the latter are those (like St. Cecilia) who remain celibate within the nuptial bond, inviolably resistant to 'flattery by delights of marriage' (59).

Virgin purity remained a powerful residual trope in the era. Control over physical integrity is often the crux in disputed transition rites. Numerous stage-heroines vow to 'die a maid' if they cannot have their choice: 'Ere morn I'll die a virgin, though a wife' proclaims a bride in Field's *A Woman is a Weathercock* (54). Several playwrights engineer scenarios in which a women is simultaneously 'both a wife and a maid' or 'a virgin, wife, and widow'.[99] In Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Mariana's exposition scene (following the nuptial bed-trick) is an extended play on such a riddle, one which introduces another aspect of feminine iconicity: 'My lord, she may be a punk; for many of them are neither maid, widow, nor wife' (5.1.179-80). Virgin-whore antitheses are frequent in the drama of the wedding night. Delayed consummation structures mean that a number of tragic heroines die in an indeterminate state, caught between two or more archetypal female roles. Similar paradoxes were common in the medieval period, with virgin martyrs appearing in art and literature as 'brides of Christ', figures of sublimated sensuality whose deaths consummate a spiritual marriage.[100] The Renaissance brought a representational shift, however, from eroticised spirituality to spiritualized eroticism. Brides of death in the later period tend not to seek eternal union with Christ but with their husbands, contracted spouses from whom they have been divided by adverse worldly forces.[101] Playwrights frequently draw on virginal iconography in depicting hazardous nuptial rites. The defloration is often at the centre of high-stakes erotic and political games. Some tragic brides, such as Marston's Sophonisba, achieve a kind of double perfection, as ardent wives who fulfil the dominant matrimonial ideal, and as vestal or Marian figures, with a vestigial protective or intercessionist magic. Others, damned as whores like Beaumont and Fletcher's Evadne, make bids to recover a lost virginal innocence in order to become a true spouse in death.

[99] Heywood, *The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon* 3.3.143; Shirley, *The Cardinal* 4.2.107.
[100] Power 2001: 91-2, 100.
[101] Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* stands as the most significant exception. See Bamford 2000: Chap. 2 on this and other Jacobean plays which present virginal 'latter-day saints'.

As noted above, the wedding night could be a focus of malicious gossip, as in the case of Frances Howard. At the other end of scale is the sympathy and admiration for Elizabeth Manners (Sidney), the daughter of Sir Philip Sidney, who appears to have endured an unhappy and unconsummated marriage.[102] She married Roger Manners at the age of twelve, and became the Countess of Rutland. Ben Jonson and Francis Beaumont were part of the literary circle she encouraged, and both allude to her marital difficulties in poems for or about her. Jonson refers to her as a 'widow'd wife' (2) while her husband is still alive, commending her chastity and fortitude in the face of rumour.[103] Beaumont's elegy for her – she died in 1612, shortly after her husband – is frank about the rumours surrounding her marriage, and even sees the poet musing over the manifold joys of a second wedding night had the Countess lived to remarry:

> And the chief
> Blessing of women, marriage, was to thee
> Nought but a sacrament of misery;
> For whom thou hadst, if we may trust to fame,
> Could change nothing about thee but thy name:
> A name which who (that were again to do't)
> Would change without a thousand joys to boot?
> In all things else thou rather led'st a life
> Like a betrothed virgin than wife. 32-40[104]

The phrase 'sacrament of misery' may suggest a sceptical take on the Catholic view of marriage, though Protestant-humanist marital idealism is also open to question when confronted by the unfortunate reality of an impotent husband. The poet's stance here is still pro-marriage, however, with his strong sense of regret that the Countess should never have known any hymeneal joy. Might Beaumont have fancied himself as a candidate to share the 'thousand joys' of a second marriage bed? (The bantering tone of an earlier verse, 'Ad Comitissam Rutlandiae', suggests that he enjoyed a flirtatious relationship with the Countess.) The behaviour of women in unconsummated marriages is highlighted in the Beaumont and Fletcher plays I consider in Chapter 6. The idealised, saint-like response of Ordella to wedding night

[102] See Herford and Simpson 1925-52: Vol I. 57 and Vol. VIII, 10.
[103] 'An Epigram. To the honour'd — Countesse of —'.
[104] 'An Elegy on the Death of the Virtuous Lady Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland, 1612'. The poem was widely circulated in manuscript.

disappointment in *Thierry and Theodoret* (c.1613), might well have been influenced by the Countess of Rutland's example.

Male expectations of the wedding night often appear to be more straightforward than those of women: both in the epithalamic tradition and in onstage banter, the lusty bridegroom is the usual counterpart to the blushing bride. He is all appetite. As we have seen, however, male sexual performance could come under legal scrutiny, especially higher up the social scale. Frequent jokes about aphrodisiacs and boasts of Herculean prowess might suggest anxieties in this regard. Instability at the gateway to manhood is a common trope. For virile males there was a double-bind, in that over-indulgence in sex was seen as making men weak and effeminate, in thrall to female power.[105] The prowess of the lover was often felt to subtract from that of the soldier, an idea repeatedly delineated in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, most famously in the Bower of Bliss episode. Such concerns are commonly reflected in the drama, as in Romeo's reaction to Mercutio's death after his own refusal to fight Tybalt: 'O sweet Juliet,/ Thy beauty hath made me effeminate,/ And in my temper soft'ned valor's steel' (3.1.113-5). (Swords are often given a phallic connotations within the 'tragic wedding' convention). Some male protagonists are called upon to fight on their wedding night in tests of honour which serve as violent analogues for the 'amorous battle' that has been displaced. Others are commanded to military action, such as Theseus in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, implored by three widowed queens to reclaim the corpses of their dead husbands. The great warrior is reluctant to let anything stand between him and what he calls 'This grand act of our life, this daring deed/ Of fate in wedlock' (1.1.164-5); he places marriage above all other acts of heroism, 'a service…/ Greater than any war' (171-2).[106] Theseus is persuaded, however, to postpone the epicurean feast of his wedding night lest he succumbs to an effeminizing hymeneal excess:

> Oh, if thou couch
> But one night with her, every hour in't will
> Take hostage of thee for a hundred and
> Thou shalt remember nothing more than what
> That banquet bids thee to. 1.1.182-6

[105] See Breitenberg 1996 and Foyster 1999 on male sexual honour and anxiety.
[106] The idea is repeated at 170-4. See Rose 1988: Chap. 3 on the heroism of marriage.

Theseus's bride, Hippolyta, modestly downplays such extravagant claims – 'Though much unlike/ You should be so transported' (186-7) – but adds her voice to the duty-first martial call. Nuptial rhetoric calls for passion, then, for uninhibited masculine force in the 'amorous battle', yet at the same time a man enters marriage as the 'head', embodying social duty and rational restraint. Theseus must 'mak'st affections bend/ To godlike honours' (229-30).[107] Within the 'tragic wedding' convention – or, as here, in a tragicomic variation – male protagonists are repeatedly depicted on this cusp, torn between love and duty, passion and reason.

Ford's line on 'flattery by delights of marriage' sounds a note of scepticism about the prevailing matrimonial ideals, one that resonates in much of the era's drama. The near-hegemonic official sanction of marriage could never eradicate a more cynical anti-wedlock discourse. The two were often interwoven, as in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, where Robert Burton presents marriage as the best remedy for love-melancholy whilst dwelling compendiously on its disadvantages (Burton himself remained a bachelor). In various colloquies, promoters of marriage contend with those who relate its woes. Treatises on marriage advise caution (particularly to men) in choosing a spouse, often acknowledging that marriage could be a heaven or a hell. Jonson acknowledges the potential difficulties of marriage in *Hymenaei*, giving voice to sexual and companionate disenchantment:

> What griefs lie groaning on the nuptial bed?
> What dull satiety? In what sheets of lead
> Tumble, and toss the restless married pair,
> Each oft offended with the other's air? 664-7

Whilst such views are exposed within the masque as Opinion rather than Truth, they would have reflected some people's experience, including Jonson's own, perhaps, judging by his reported comments on his marriage.[108] The marital life of Puttenham should give us pause, too, with regard to the reality behind the rhetoric; he may have declared marriage 'the highest and holiest of any ceremony appertaining to man', but if records of the divorce proceedings brought by his wife are a reliable guide, the self-

[107] Bushnell 1990: 20-25, 63-69 discusses the widely held view that a king ruled by desire would become a tyrant.
[108] Donaldson 2011: 181. 'Opinion' was a byword for uninformed populist judgement. See also Dubrow 1990: 209ff. on the ambivalence to wedlock in Jonson's epithalamia and masques.

styled 'civil poet' (97) was an abysmally uncivil husband.[109] Much of the romantic drama of the era focuses on the heightened marital aspirations of the nobility or gentry, yet Lawrence Stone observes that between 1595 and 1620 'something like one-third of the older peers were estranged from or actually separated from their wives'.[110] Wedding night tragedy tends to depict rapid marital breakdown in extreme circumstances, but these actions are sometimes set alongside or shaped by longer-term spousal rancour.

Anti-matrimonial cynicism could be unambiguously overt. Ancient currents of misogyny and misogamy still held considerable sway in popular culture. Jest-books and satires were heavily populated by put-upon, impotent cuckolds and shrewish, improvident, wanton wives. Church authorities were concerned enough about some such publications to burn them in the 1599 Bishops' Ban.[111] Many plays incorporate material of this type, often written by those who promote wedlock elsewhere. Comedies such as Beaumont's *The Woman Hater* (1606) and Jonson's *Epicoene* (1609) contain extended anti-feminist and anti-marriage diatribes. A similarly derisive, if more embittered, discourse permeates many tragedies too: 'I say we will have no moe marriage' declares Hamlet (3.1.147). Dramatists explore the tensions between matrimonial idealism and cynicism in playworlds that are often frighteningly perverse, with lovers sometimes tormented by satanic humorists. In Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, the cruel jests of Ferdinand at the expense of the cuckold, Castruccio, are a prelude to his deadly pranks in revenge for his sister's clandestine marriage. I am unpersuaded by W. H. Auden's view of Iago a 'practical joker of a particularly appalling kind',[112] but the ensign does indeed sound at times like a walking jest-book as he targets Othello and Desdemona on their wedding night. Iago has also been seen as engaged in a blackly comic version of the charivari, or ritual humiliation, for his own entertainment.[113]

Some of the scepticism about the dominant marital ideology centred on whether desire could, or even should, be harnessed. The rule of reason over the passions was a

[109] May 2008.
[110] Stone 1965: 661. Lindley 1993: 80 quotes a 1608 wedding sermon that laments the widespread marital ruptures 'specially amongst men of higher place'.
[111] Gildenhuys 1993: 22-30.
[112] Auden 1962: 253.
[113] Bristol 1992.

cornerstone of Christian and Stoic morality, but Burton presents desire as a 'destructive passion' beyond rational control, an insatiable force that could scarcely be contained within monogamous marriage.[114] For Montaigne, the impetuous nature of desire in both sexes is at odds with constancy. In his famously candid essay, 'On Some lines of Virgil', he enthuses over his *affaires d'amour* and questions those 'who think to honour marriage by associating passion with it', expecting a wife to be both hot and cold, mistress and matron; there is, he suggests, 'a kind of lewdness… in deploying the rapturous strivings of Love's licentiousness within such a relationship, which is sacred and to be revered' (959).[115] Montaigne's embrace of illicit sexuality does not detract from his regard for matrimony as a social and familial institution. Others, however, inclined more toward the libertine view expressed in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* that 'marriage is but a ceremonial toy' (1.5.153). Libertinism was seen in England as a continental import. In *The Schoolmaster* (1570), Roger Ascham complains of Italian manuals of vice, 'sold in every shop in London', containing such 'subtle, cunning, new, and diverse shifts… as the simple head of an Englishman is not able to invent' (39, 67-9).[116] The anti-theatricalist, Stephen Gosson, decries the pernicious influence of 'wanton Italian books' (90) on the English stage.[117] Ian Moulton notes 'widespread concern about the existence of a deviant counterculture within the capital' and the 'compelling mix of fascination, admiration, and horror' excited by the pornographic writings of Aretino.[118] John Vander Noodt railed against 'voluptuous Worldlings' and 'carnall libertines' in 1599,[119] the year that the bishops burned not only anti-marriage works but also erotic publications, such as Marlowe's translations of Ovid. In *The New Atlantis*, Francis Bacon holds that modest spousal intimacy is struggling to compete with libertine enticements: 'the delight in meretricious embracements (where sin is turned into art), maketh marriage a dull thing, and a kind of imposition or tax' (476).

An emergent libertine discourse is of significance in a number of plays I consider, as it influences expectations of sex within as well as outside of marriage. A libertine credo is articulated in Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606) by Lussurioso, a

[114] Burton 1994: Vol. III, 54.
[115] Page references to Screech edition.
[116] Quoted in Moulton 2000: 117.
[117] Gosson, *Plays Confuted* in Pollard edition.
[118] Moulton 2000: 115, 157. See also Boose 1994.
[119] Quoted in Jones 1989: 187.

sybarite named after the *Sonnetti Lussuriosi* of Aretino. He basks in 'this luxurious day wherein we breathe' (1.3.112), priding himself on a duplicitous facility with matrimonial rhetoric:

> LUSSURIOSO I'm one of that number can defend
> Marriage is good, yet rather keep a friend.
> Give me my bed by stealth, there's true delight;
> What breeds a loathing in't but night by night?
> VINDICE A very fine religion. 1.3.105-8

Celibate priests of the middle ages were often accused of sexual hypocrisy; here, a similar scepticism is directed towards contemporary promoters of the conjugal ideal. Lussurioso refutes paradisal claims for the marriage bed by suggesting, like Jonson's figure of Opinion, that erotic familiarity breeds contempt. Vindice's sardonic response implies that illicit sex is the new religion. Robert Ornstein argues that tragedians staged 'the shocking heresies of libertine and atheistic naturalism' in order to exploit a topical theme for sensational purposes.[120] The threat is not to be taken too seriously, he suggests, since 'libertinism remained a purely "literary" creed', one that 'apparently won few English converts even among the poets' (45). I agree, up to a point. The lustful tyrant was indeed a cultural bogeyman. On the stage, a number of grotesque, farcical over-reachers aspire to god-like sensual fulfilment in depraved exotic courts. 'Our God shall be our pleasure' proclaims Mullisheg, the King of Fesse in Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West* (Pt.1, 313) who attempts to steal the first fruits of the English heroine, Besse Bridges, only to be comically outwitted in a double bed-trick.[121] Libertine antagonists should not be dismissed too lightly, however. The *droit du seigneur*, as depicted in plays such as Dekker's *Satiromastix* and Fletcher and Massinger's *The Custom of the Country*, may have been a chimerical threat – one diffused in these plays by tragicomic reversals – but abuse of authority to erotic ends was common enough in early modern society.[122] 'Tragic wedding' scenarios channel a number of genuine class-based sexual fears.

Not all lustful stage-villains are mere caricatures. The charismatic dissidence of some libertine threats to marriage can be complex and alluring. Illicit epicurean fantasies

[120] Ornstein 1960: 44.
[121] The nuptial bed-trick occurs in Pt.2.
[122] See, for example, Varholy 2008; Hubbard 2012: Chap. 3.

are not always easy to distinguish, rhetorically, from the erotic exhortations of humanist wedding oratory. Both have god-like expectations of sensual fulfilment. Poets and dramatists satirised debauchery, but some, such as Donne and Marston, were conflicted (in youth at least) between companionate and libertine doctrines.[123] Philip Finkelpearl observes that amongst Inns of Court students a 'simultaneous admiration for the code of courtly love and for the morals of an Aretino is everywhere apparent', whilst Michelle O'Callaghan notes the 'provocative libertinism' – performed in a spirit of 'learned play' – of the Middle Temple's *Le Prince d'Amour* revels of 1597-98.[124] Marston, a Middle Temple resident at the time, is key in bringing this discourse to the professional stage, initially in boy company productions written with Inns of Court playgoers in mind. His comedies offer dialectical explorations of romantic idealism and scepticism, courtship and libertinism, ultimately promoting marriage based on the principle of 'modest amorousness' (3.520). This oxymoron from *The Fawn* is Marston's attempt to synthesise doctrines of erotic indulgence and restraint. I return to this point in later chapters, but for now it suffices to say that a strain often shows, particularly in those works in which libertinism is tackled head-on, such as *The Dutch Courtesan* and *The Insatiate Countess*. The former has the didactic purpose of revealing the 'difference betwixt the love of a courtesan and a wife'[125] – that is, between a bewitchingly dangerous siren and a paragon of modest devotion. In the latter play, a wedding night sparks off the tragically murderous career of a female libertine. In both cases the chaste lesson is easily drawn, yet illicit threats to a licit consummation are dramatised in ways that complicate simple moral binaries.

This last point is generally true of the numerous plays in which wedding nights are contested, where the ideologies outlined above often come into meaningful and affective play. A further example of the tensions between companionate and libertine doctrines can be seen in the prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which was probably written by Fletcher:[126]

> New plays and maidenheads are near akin—
> Much followed both, for both much money gi'en,

[123] See Norbrook 2005: 41; Turner 1993: 127.
[124] Finkelpearl 1969: 60; O'Callaghan 2007: 23, 27.
[125] From the *Fabulae Argumentum* that prefaces the published text.
[126] See Waith 1989: 23.

If they stand sound and well. And a good play,
Whose modest scenes blush on his marriage-day
And shake to lose his honour, is like her
That after holy tie and first night's stir
Yet still is Modesty and still retains
More of the maid, to sight, than husband's pains.
We pray our play may be so 1-9.

The (implicitly male) playgoers are teasingly construed as whore-hounds in search of virgins. A second metaphor presents the play on opening night as a nervously virginal groom, then (switching gender) as a chaste and compliant wife for the remainder of its run. This is a companionate marriage sealed both by solemnization ('holy tie') and consummation ('first night's stir'). The playhouse doubles as brothel and bridal-chamber, a space at once licit and illicit in which the play seeks to please its audience. Perhaps we should not press the playfully salacious analogies too far, but they show once more the hold of the nuptial night (and defloration) on the theatrical imagination, as well as the ideological swirl in which the playwrights were operating. The play dates from 1613-14; the preceding few years (as I demonstrate in Chapters 5 and 6) had brought a spate of wedding night dramas. Its sub-plot builds to a perversely legitimate consummation-cum-rape which serves as a therapeutic cure of the Jailor's Daughter's love-madness. The play opens, as we have seen, with a Greek hero whose wedding procession is interrupted by black-clad widows. It is to classical (and other) sources of 'tragic wedding' tropes that I turn in my next section.

'AS TO THY MARRIAGE, SO UNTO THY DEATH': TRAGIC WEDDING SOURCES AND ARCHETYPES

'Tragic wedding' plots and motifs occur in folk tales and ballads from across the world. Brides and bridegrooms face violence or death at the hands of angry parents, jealous rivals, feuding foes, rapacious pirates, lustful tyrants, terrible monsters – and sometimes each other. Whether the threat comes from the devil incarnate or some inner demon, marital rites of passage are often beset with disturbance or danger. Reasons for uncertainty at the threshold to marriage might include anxieties over

defloration and sexual performance, fears surrounding the transition to a new household and to adult responsibility, and endogamous or exogamous taboos – over incest, say, or the infiltration of the sexual Other. Some 'tragic wedding' tales reflect troubling realities such as forced marriage or bride-snatching. Sir Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), for example, is based on a case of attempted wedding night murder on the part of an unwilling bride. In other stories forced marriage might lead to romantic martyrdom, as in the Butterfly Lovers legend of Jin-dynasty China, or the Romeo and Juliet tale of Renaissance Italy. Not all traditional nuptial stories end badly, of course, but a liminal threat or anxiety is often felt. It persists in many modern works or genres, from nineteenth-century opera to contemporary soap opera, from Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* to Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, from Lorca's *Blood Wedding* to *Game of Thrones*' Red Wedding.

George L. L. Martin, the fantasy writer on whose books the *Game of Thrones* show is based, draws on a host of historical and legendary sources to fuel the multiple plots twists of his saga, which includes several 'broken nuptial' scenarios.[127] Early modern dramatists often went about much the same process in creating their own popular fictions, utilising a range of mythopoetic and narratological devices, including the 'tragic wedding' chronotope. Highlighting 'universal' motifs and deep-structure narratology has been branded in some poststructuralist discourse as empty formalism, a manifestation of an apolitical, tradition-bound humanism. Literary criticism of the late twentieth century was concerned less with permanent or transcendent forms than with discontinuities, political contingencies, and genre instability or indeterminacy. It is not possible, however, to identify innovations without an understanding of tradition, and a number of critics have since sought a more balanced approach. Rita Felski, in her introduction to *Rethinking Tragedy*, argues for criticism that enriches 'our sense of the historical provenance of works of art' whilst accounting 'for the ways in which texts persist and signify across time'; in the same volume, Simon Goldhill calls similarly for a 'double attentiveness' to both socio-political context and transhistorical appeal when addressing genre (in his case Greek tragedy).[128] This is the path I try to follow with regard to early modern 'wedding night tragedy', addressing both its timebound socio-symbolic functions and its enduring aesthetic resonance.

[127] See Larrington 2016.
[128] Felski 2008: 15; Goldhill 2008: 61.

To trace every 'tragic wedding' source would be a labour of heroic Borgesian futility; I offer, rather, a sketch of the archetypal terrain out of which the theatregram emerges, looking at some of the likely iconographic and structural influences on early modern dramatists. In my study as a whole, I hope to capture a sense of process in how motifs and narremes became a fully-fledged dramatic convention. I give considerable weight to classical models, particularly to marriage-to-death paradigms developed in Hellenic culture. This is not to suggest that neoclassical humanist drama is at the heart of the early modern theatregram – it takes populist dramaturgy rooted in vernacular traditions to energise the tropes in performance. The 'university wits' do play a vital role, however, in bringing 'tragic wedding' plots and motifs to the professional stage, as I show in Chapter 2. And the classical influence on *romantic* tragedy is a rather neglected area of study compared with, say, the influence of ancient models on revenge or political tragedy. In *Shakespeare and Ovid*, Jonathan Bate writes of an affinity between the two writers that goes beyond straightforward allusion, working unseen in the imagination. I have a similar sense of how the 'tragic wedding' nexus found in Renaissance drama shows a broad imaginative affinity with Greek tragedy, one often channelled through Roman conduits (including Ovid). In both eras we see 'a remarkable convergence of themes linked with death and sex',[129] a persistent focus on hymeneal initiation rites, and a hubristic aspect to god-like erotic aspirations.

The Hellenic myth kitty has numerous 'fatal marriage' and 'broken nuptials' stories. Rites and taboos surrounding marriage and sex are at the heart of many of the great myth cycles, with nuptial occasions often the site of disturbance. Mythical heroes leave a trail of abandoned spouses behind them, often with tragic consequences, some of which are played out on the wedding day, as in the story of Jason and Medea. Neglect of ceremony and abuses of power are punished – unless perpetrated by the gods, as in the type of *droit du seigneur* nuptial rape when Zeus disguises himself as Amphitron, the husband of Alcmene.[130] Some stories appear to stem from a concern to distinguish between rape and marriage;[131] famous examples include the abduction of Persephone to be the bride of Hades, and the battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs,

[129] Nagy 2013: 76.
[130] The consummation of the marriage between Alcmene and Amphitron has been delayed.
[131] Rehm 1994: 38-9, 75-6.

provoked by an attempt to abduct the bride at a wedding feast.[132] (A performance of the latter is rejected as a nuptial entertainment in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but it is enacted with six centaurs clomping the stage in Heywood's *The Silver Age*.) The Trojan War cycles of nuptial deception involving Iphigenia and Polyxena are important in initiating the theme of the sacrificial bride. The most obvious wedding *night* tragedy is the legend of the Danaids, fifty daughters of Danaus forced into marriage on a single night, all but one of whom murder their husbands in their bridal chambers.

Such stories permeated Greek culture, in statuary, vase painting, poetry and drama. According to Eva Keuls, 'The theme of the murderous Danaids was one of the most, perhaps the most, widely dramatised motifs in Greek culture'.[133] Aeschylus wrote a Danaid trilogy, of which only one, *The Suppliants*, survives; it shows the growing terror of the brides at the approach of 'a hateful marriage to men/ who are our foes' (1063-4). A fragment from early in the third play suggests that well-wishers awakened the newlyweds with a song, unaware of the bridal-chamber massacre about to be revealed.[134] This is the kind of dramatic irony based on perverted ritual that we find in early modern plays such as Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, with its gruesome bridal-morning scene. The direct influence of Attic drama upon the early modern English stage is usually assumed to have been minimal, since few of the plays were readily available in print, either in Greek or in translation, and productions were matters of scholarly endeavour rather than popular theatre.[135] Aeschylus seems to have been the least well-known of the Greek tragedians, so few would have encountered *The Suppliants* at first hand. That said, the story of the Danaids is told in Ovid's *Heroides*, where it is narrated by Hypermestra, the one bride who preserves her husband's life, and the tales behind Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, which contain numerous 'tragic wedding' motifs,[136] were familiar too. I consider stagings of the death of Agamemnon in plays by Thomas Heywood and Thomas Goffe in Chapter 5.

[132] See Rehm 1994: 36-40.
[133] Keuls 1993: 338.
[134] See Sommerstein 2010: 101, 105-6.
[135] Bushnell 2005: 297.
[136] Rehm 1994: Chap. 3; Wohl 1998: 71-82.

Sophocles' *Antigone* contains another wedding that turns to ashes.[137] The play was probably best known to English dramatists from a 1581 translation into Latin by Thomas Watson, a version praised by both Peele and Nashe. The king, Creon, faced with Antigone's defiance over her brother's burial rites, imagines having her 'killed/ at once, before her bridegroom's very eyes' (760-1). The day should, it seems, have seen the union of Antigone and Haemon, Creon's son. As it is, Antigone is walled up and left to die in a cave, which she calls her 'bridal-chamber' (891). She laments her 'unwedded and accursed' fate (869), acutely conscious of her failure to enter womanhood. We learn from a messenger that she hangs herself, espoused to 'the bridegroom, Death' (816). Haemon's final act, on finding her, is to fall upon his sword and unite with her in a tragic consummation:

> While yet the life was in him he embraced
> The girl with failing arms, and breathing hard
> Poured out his life-blood on to her white face.
> So side by side they lie, and both are dead.
> Not in this world but in the world below
> He wins his bride 1237-42.

The never-to-be-known nuptial bed is implied here. Greek tragedy does not bring the bed onstage, as occurs in some English Renaissance drama, but the marriage bed is of major symbolic importance.[138] The erotic nature of the union in death, at least on Haemon's part,[139] is reinforced by the chorus's song on the overwhelming power of love (781-801). Whilst Antigone's self-sacrifice for a moral cause is the play's central tragic event, it is worth noting that Haemon is elsewhere bracketed by Watson with more famous figures such Leander and Pyramus as a 'true-hearted lover' who dies for love.[140] The ancient 'tragic wedding' link between an eroticized death and a monumentalized self-sacrifice was not lost on Renaissance playwrights, as we shall see in plays such as *Sophonisba* and *Thierry and Theodoret*.

The Greek tragedian best known in Renaissance England was Euripides, partly through translations into Latin, and partly because of Senecan reworkings. *Medea* is

[137] Rehm 1994: Chap. 4; Ormand 1999: Chap. 4.
[138] See, for example, Loraux 1987: 23-4 and Kaimio 2002: 95-119.
[139] Antigone is more ambiguous in romantic terms. In Euripides' *The Phoenician Women* she threatens to kill Haemon on the wedding night like one of the Danaids (1670ff).
[140] Introductory comments to *Hekatompathia* XXX.

one of the most compelling of nuptial tragedies. The action takes place on the wedding day of Jason to his new bride, Glauce; his first marriage to Medea, the mother of his children, is deemed unlawful due to her non-Greek origin. Medea faces banishment from Corinth but is allowed to remain one last day. The nuptial significance is continually reinforced, as in Medea's revenge fantasy: 'Should I set fire to the house,/ And burn the bridal chamber? Or creep up to their bed/ And drive a sharp knife through their guts?' (379-81). She opts rather to feign acceptance of the match, sending a dress and coronet to Glauce, gifts laced with poison. The chorus envisages Glauce 'preparing her bridal beauty/ To enter a new home – among the dead' (986-7). The flame-like working of the poison turns 'Jason's new bride into her own wedding brand'.[141] Finally, Medea takes the lives of her sons as the ultimate nuptial revenge on Jason. Other plays by Euripides display a preoccupation with the perversion of wedding ritual in scenes of murder, suicide and sacrifice. *Iphigenia in Aulis* is the most famous example: the mock-marriage of Iphigenia to Achilles is used to mask a sacrifice which Euripides presents as both a shameful work of political expedience and a terrible religious crime.[142] Again, as with Sophocles' Antigone, there is a powerful sense of loss over the failed transition to maturity. In *Hecabe*, Polyxena's sacrifice at Achilles' tomb is figured as a 'twisted wedding with the dead';[143] she dies as a paradoxical 'unwedded bride' (612) of the type noted in English drama above. Perhaps the most savagely ironic use of marriage rites is found in Euripides' *The Women of Troy* (*Troades*): when Cassandra is assigned to be the concubine (or war bride) of Agamemnon, she sings a fiercely sardonic mock-epithalamion, whirling madly about the stage with a wedding torch, presenting herself as a 'fatal bride' of retributive justice, whose 'bridal-bed/ Promises death to my worst enemy' (357, 403-4).[144] Such subversions of wedding ritual are frequently echoed in Renaissance tragedy.

The impact of Seneca's Roman tragedies on English Renaissance revenge drama has been widely discussed, but little has been said of his extensive use of 'tragic wedding' topoi. In his *Medea*, Seneca follows Euripides in setting the action on Jason's

[141] Rehm 1994: 104.
[142] The Roman poet, Lucretius, also presents the 'tragic wedding' sacrifice of Iphigenia as an object lesson in religious impiety in *De Rerum Natura*, I.83-101.
[143] Rehm 1994: 129. See also Foley 1985: Chap. 2.
[144] See Rehm 1994: Chap. 9, and Tufte 1970: 39-43.

wedding day. The play opens with Medea's vengeful soliloquy in which she calls for divine retribution to fall on Jason as he beds his new wife. She summons the Furies to administer the rites. Her bitterness is juxtaposed with the rejoicing of the chorus that enters in procession, singing a radiant epithalamion – until it encounters Medea and the celebrations are cut short. Again, this is a model for the rite-based proleptic ironies so integral to Renaissance tragedy. Seneca's *Trojan Women* has a clearer and more developed nuptial scenario than the extant Greek sources it draws upon.[145] The Trojan princess, Polyxena, is sacrificed at the tomb of Achilles to appease his ghost and allow the Greek troops to sail from Troy (a mirror to the sacrifice of Iphigenia on their outward journey). It is 'a grisly rite/ where murder masquerades as a kind of marriage' (287-8).[146] The role of bridegroom in the sham ceremony is played by Achilles' son, Pyrrhus, the man who killed Polyxena's father. Polyxena learns of the plot in advance but shows notable bravery, preferring marriage-to-death to the role of concubine-wife. She remains powerfully mute during her one appearance. A messenger's report tells how she bears herself proudly in the bridal procession and how, at the sacrificial altar, she bravely faces Pyrrhus's 'naked blade' (1140). The flames of Troy serve as nuptial torches.

In Jasper Heywood's *Troas*, an influential 1559 translation of Seneca's *Trojan Women*, the stance of Polyxena in neatly summed up:

> To wed she thought it death: to dye,
> she thinkes a wedding day. 2165-6

The story is recalled in Thomas Lodge's Roman history play, *The Wounds of Civil War* (c.1588), when a Roman noblewoman, Fulvia, expecting execution, laments the wedding she will never know:

> Poor Fulvia, now thy happy days are done!
> Instead of marriage pomp, the fatal lights
> Of funerals must masque about thy bed p.161.

Her mother exhorts Stoic courage, reminding her of Polyxena's example:

> Pass with the thrice-renowned Phrygian dame,
> As to thy marriage, so unto thy death p.164.

[145] See Panoussi 2005: 422-26. See also Tufte 1970: 44-48.
[146] Slavitt edition.

No such fatal marriage occurs in Lodge's play, but we see a conscious deployment of motifs in which marriage rites are supplanted by those associated with sacrifice and funeral. There is also, in the phrase 'masque about thy bed' an incipient sense of dramatic possibility, a hint that inverted ceremonials might be brought to bear on the bridal-chamber – possibilities that other English dramatists would go on to explore. The theme of willing bridal sacrifice appears in various plays, most notably *Thierry and Theodoret* which I discuss in Chapter 6. William Heminge's *The Fatal Contract* (1633-4) stages an interesting reversal of the Iphigenia and Polyxena stories when a sacrifice at an altar turns into a marriage, albeit one that comes immediately under threat. The English dramatists absorbed and adapted 'fatal marriage' precedents in classical drama to wide-ranging effect.

The most fascinating of the Roman 'tragic wedding' plays is *Octavia*, formerly attributed to Seneca, but now considered post-Senecan. It brims with dark nuptial motifs, which are worth outlining as the play is, in my view, an influential model for Renaissance drama. It opens with Octavia, daughter of the Emperor Claudius, looking back and lamenting her marriage to her stepbrother, the Emperor Nero. Their union was at the instigation of her stepmother, Agrippina, who is called the Fury that 'Lighted my marriage chamber/ With Stygian torches' (26-7).[147] A similar image appears when Octavia recalls the 'infernal' bigamous marriage made by her natural mother, Messalina: a 'vengeful Fury' was in attendance, snatching the nuptial chamber torches to 'quench their fire in blood' (285-8). Nero divorces Octavia to marry his mistress Poppaea, who is pregnant with his child. On their wedding night, the vengeful ghost of Agrippina, a victim of matricide, appears with 'infernal torches…/ To greet this impious marriage'; these nuptial symbols will turn to 'funeral fires' (597-601). A Roman mob, horrified by the 'dazzling image of Poppaea/ Coupled with Nero', rises up out of sympathy for Octavia (686-7); they tear down statues of Poppaea and advance on the palace. The bride emerges from the nuptial chamber in tears, having dreamt (as she lay in Nero's arms) firstly of Agrippina grasping 'a blood-stained torch' (723), and secondly of falling into an abyss, only to land safely on the marriage bed she shared with her former husband. The latter reclaims her, but is killed when Nero forces his way into the dream bedchamber – a

[147] Watling edition.

destroyer, by implication, of true marriage. Meanwhile, Octavia senses that she will be the day's 'sacrifice' (663), which proves prescient when Nero's army puts down the insurrection and Octavia is banished – ultimately to be murdered. She is compared at her parting to Iphigenia, as a victim of political and religious injustice. This incident-packed tragedy anticipates the tumult and verve of the early modern London stage. It is notable for its blend of domestic drama and political rebellion, its lustful tyrant, and its subverted wedding night. There are tragicomic aspects too – the attempt by Poppaea's nurse to put a positive spin on her dream is hilarious. All of this strongly anticipates the many early modern plays, such as *Antonio's Revenge* and *The Maid's Tragedy*, in which nuptial and political upheavals are interwoven.

Such imagery occurs in Ovid, another major influence on English dramatists. In his *Metamorphoses*, Eurydice is taken from Orpheus when bitten by a snake on their ill-omened wedding day: Hymen's torch 'kept sputtering smoke, brought tears/ to the eyes but never ignited' (10.6-7). The poet describes the wedding of Tereus and Procne as unblessed by the marriage gods – instead 'Furies provided the escort with torches snatched from a funeral/ Furies prepared the nuptial couch' (6.430-1). The female laments of Ovid's *Heroides*, many of which see abandoned wives petitioning faithless husbands, make frequent use of 'tragic wedding' motifs. The speakers recall death-marked bridals attended by Furies with funereal hymns and torches; the more vengeful curse the marriage beds of their rivals.[148] Ovid's Medea is a tearful, pathetic figure until she hears the hymeneal procession for Jason and his new bride; to her ears, the blaring music is a muted death-march, prompting thoughts of a drastic revenge.[149] The wedding night tragedy of the Danaids is narrated by Hypermestra, who recalls a city forsaken by the marriage-gods, and the joyful entrance of the grooms to 'bridal chambers/ which will become their tombs', to couches that serve as 'funeral beds' (126).[150] Such motifs as these – the diabolical wedding-brand, the nuptial music fatally untuned, the bridal-chamber as a crypt – resonate through English Renaissance drama, not only as poetic images but also, as we shall see, as vital and visceral elements of stagecraft.

[148] See, for example, the epistles of Phyllis, Hypsipyle and Dido.
[149] Ovid's lost dramatization of the Medea story was greatly lauded.
[150] Page reference to Isbell translation.

Anti-epithalamic imagery associated with cursed marriages is widely dispersed in the work of other Latin poets. One particularly significant 'fatal marriage' was that Dido and Aeneas, recounted most famously by Virgil in *The Aeneid*.[151] The storm created by Juno, the marriage-goddess, leads Dido and Aeneas to shelter in a cave where an unsolemnized sexual union takes place as

> lightning torches flare
> and the high sky bears witness to the wedding,
> nymphs on the mountaintop wail out the wedding hymn.
> This was the first day of her death, the first of grief,
> The cause of it all. 4. 210-14

Early modern dramatists find distinctive ways of presaging the tragedy when staging this scene, as discussed in Chapter 2. Roman poets such as Propertius and Lucan also make powerful use of 'tragic wedding' imagery, linking weddings and funerals, beds and tombs.[152] Catullus is of particular significance, given that his ebullient verse 61 was the greatest influence on the celebratory Renaissance epithalamion. The poet's other wedding verses are far more ambiguous or tragic, however. Catullus 62 voices a powerful bridal resistance to defloration in the face of oppressive social and sexual control.[153] And Catullus 64, an epyllion on the mythical marriage of Peleus and Thetis, starts in celebratory epithalamic mode but turns savagely ironic, foretelling the birth of Achilles that will lead to numerous deaths, including, above all, the impious bridal sacrifice of Polyxena as a 'butchered virgin' (364). The gods, suggest Catullus, have abandoned human marriage.[154] The poem's lengthy ekphrastic digression on Theseus's marital betrayal of Ariadne is a source for Aspatia's nuptial lament in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*.

Another major influence on English drama is the Greek romance (or novel) of late antiquity. An Elizabethan translation of Heliodorus's *An Ethiopian Story* appeared in 1567 and the impact was marked: Stephen Gosson suggested in 1582 that Heliodorus had 'been thoroughly ransackt, to furnish the Playe houses in London', whilst Joseph Hall asked a couple of decades later, 'What Scole-boy, what apprentice knows not

[151] But see also Ovid's version in *Heroides*.
[152] Eg. Propertius's 'Letter to a husband at the front' and 'The story of Tarpeia', and Book II of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. See Tufte 1970: 49-51 on the anti-epithalamic aspects of the latter.
[153] Seaford 1987: 114 calls it 'very Greek'.
[154] Tufte 1970: 30-36.

Heliodorus?'[155] The genre is characterised by the separation of lovers who are put through numerous near-tragic trials before they are reunited in a happy end. The importance of Hellenic romance to early modern romantic comedy has often been noted, but we should also recognise its importance to romantic tragedy. The genre is a repository of 'broken nuptial' scenarios and motifs, such as the slandered-bride plot of Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* in which the bridegroom's rivals determine to 'make this marriage fatal' (24),[156] and the litany from Achilles Tatius's *Leukippe and Kleitophon*: 'Your bridal chamber is the grave, your wedlock is with death, your wedding march a funeral hymn, your marriage song this dirge' (186). The other crucial aspect for the 'fatal marriage' convention is that, in the works by Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius, the main romantic narrative concerns a bride and groom separated on their wedding day, 'broken nuptials' which result in an interminably postponed consummation. The virginal lovers face sexual temptations and violent threats, many of which touch on the displaced wedding night. A range of effects is created – sensational, titillating, poignant and passionate – in a genre teeming with sexual personae. We see the influence in Spenser's decision to delay the nuptial union of Scudamore and Amoret in the second edition of *The Faerie Queene*: Amoret soon faces sexual threats and slander as a 'virgin wife' (IIII.6).[157] There is a rush to fill the narrative gap between vow and consummation. I discuss plays such as *Cymbeline* and *The Custom of the Country*, the Jacobean tragicomedies that draw most clearly on this romance model. Of more significance still to my overall thesis is the adaptation of the 'delayed consummation' structure to a *tragic* end, an innovation addressed in my chapters on Shakespeare and Marston.

A measure of Attic influence on English drama also came via Italy, where a school of dramatists, 'the Grecians' as Marvin Herrick calls them, produced plays drawing upon Greek themes and structure.[158] Giangiorgio Trissino's *Sofonisba* (1515), the story of a queen who commits suicide rather than be enslaved, is considered the first major attempt at neoclassical tragedy based on Aristotelian theories.[159] It can also be seen as

[155] Quoted in Sandy 2003: 735, 766.
[156] Page references to Reardon edition. An Italian variation is a source for the slandered-bride plot in *Much Ado About Nothing*.
[157] Amoret was first spirited away during a masque on their wedding day; the 1590 edition of Books I-III ends with the pair reunited in an erotic embrace.
[158] Herrick 1965: 43-71.
[159] Herrick 1965: 53-4.

a significant 'tragic wedding' play: Trissino sets the action on single day, that of the heroine's second marriage, which is also the day of her death. The main source is the Roman historian, Livy, whose own account seems influenced by motifs derived from tragic drama: Sophonisba is torn 'away from the marriage couch' by the Romans; her first husband, Syphax, states that all of his troubles stem from his wedding night ('From those nuptial torches his palace had taken fire'); and the queen drinks a 'wedding gift' of poison as if fully conscious of her role as tragic bride: 'it would have been easier for me to die if I had not married at my funeral' (411, 415, 421).[160] Sophonisba became an iconic figure in Renaissance art, particularly in Italy and France. She was widely depicted in poetry, painting and drama – 'the most popular subject of all' on the stage, according to Lynette Muir.[161] When a French translation of Trissino's play was staged at the court of Catherine de Medici as part of a multiple wedding celebration, a thirteen-year-old Mary, Queen of Scots took the title role. Muir relates the story that Catherine was later so perturbed by the ensuing marital bad luck of many involved that she never allowed another play to be staged at court.[162] It is the kind of anxiety felt by a prescient Balthazar in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* when presented with a tragic plot for his own nuptial entertainment: 'Methinks a comedy were better' (4.1.149). It is worth noting that when his vengeful adversary, Hieronimo, demurs – 'Give me a stately-written tragedy,/F *Tragedia cothurnata*' (4.1.152-3) – he cites both Italian and French tragedians as exemplars.

The various neoclassical takes on the Sophonisba story might help us to locate what was so innovative in the English approach to nuptial tragedy. For Italian and French playwrights, the death of Sophonisba fulfilled the Aristotelian requirement of a 'single noble action' perfectly.[163] Modern commentators, however, tend to see the subject as unsuited to great tragic art, lacking as it does any significant 'discovery'.[164] On top of this, the neoclassical dramatists turn the Carthaginian princess into a model of charm and Christianized piety, leaving little trace of what Gillian Sharman calls 'the virile and heroic exploiter of men for her own and her country's ends'.[165] Trissino tones

[160] Page references to Moore translation.
[161] Muir 2007: 186.
[162] Muir 2007: 185.
[163] Phillips-Court 2011: 60.
[164] See Herrick 1965: 45-57, Sharman 1997: 24, and the comments of Axelrad and Ricci quoted in Muir 2007: 189-90.
[165] Sharman 1997: 25.

down Sophonisba's overt sexuality (the action stops short of the nuptial chamber) and adds characters to establish her as a maternal and sisterly figure. A priest validates her hasty, bigamous union, which Trissino further attempts to legitimise by introducing a prior betrothal between Sophonisba and Massinissa.[166] Trissino's version has often been considered more worthy of the study than the stage, though Kristin Phillips-Court makes a strong case for its iconic impact, as the queen's 'erotically charged' and 'beautiful' death is 'aestheticized into spectacle'.[167] (She dies, onstage, in white bridal robes.) On the whole, however, Renaissance dramatists divest Sophonisba of the passion, volatility and intransigence that could have made for a tragic heroine in the mould, say, of Shakespeare's Cleopatra. But has the subject 'always resisted successful tragic treatment'?[168] My discussion of Marston's version in Chapter 4 attempts to challenge this view by arguing for it as a successful blend of the neoclassical and the populist, and as an instance of the 'delayed consummation' structure being put to significant tragic use.

It is clear that a 'tragic wedding' theatregram is developed in Italy before England.[169] Another Italian play of 1515, Giovanni Rucellai's *Rosamunda*, blends Sophoclean themes with Senecan horror in a nuptial scenario, one that involves the heroine being forced to drink (offstage) from her father's skull at her wedding ceremony. Alboin, the drunken tyrannical bridegroom, is himself beheaded (again offstage) in his tent by a male avenger dressed as a woman. A similar skull-drinking pledge is performed, in more visceral fashion, on the English stage in Davenant's nuptial tragedy, *Albovine*, and in Middleton's tragicomedy, *The Witch*. 'Tragic wedding' rhetoric and imagery is found in numerous other Italian plays. Nuptial dilemmas are at the heart of Tasso's *Torrismondo* (1587), with its Sophoclean incest plot. Secret or bigamous marriages lead to gruesome mock ceremonies or wedding gifts in Cinthio's influential *Orbecche* (1541), Groto's *Dalida* (1572) and Manfredi's *Semiramis* (1583). The heroine in Verlato's *Rodopeia* (1582) is handed the heart of her bridegroom. Many of the horrors are recounted by messengers, as in Greek tragedy, though some are staged, as in populist English tragedy. With their intricate historical or *novelle*-based plots, often

[166] This is a feature of the other main historical account, by Appian.
[167] Phillips-Court 2011: 60, 76.
[168] Sharman 1997: 24.
[169] I rely largely on Herrick 1965 for the plot outlines (few of the plays are translated into English).

combining 'love or lust with revenge',[170] Italian tragedies of blood are an undoubted influence on their English descendents, but they do not contain intimate domestic scenes; there is little to parallel the sense of 'privileged witness' gained through the representation of such intimacy on the English stage. In Turco's *Calestri* (1560), for example, a bridal bed burdened with three corpses is kept offstage, whereas audiences for *Othello* witness the three bodies that load the marriage bed to momentous effect.

Classical and neoclassical sources were not the only influences on the early modern 'tragic wedding'. Medieval and early Renaissance literature, much of it rooted in folk-tale, affords some notable wedding night incidents, such as the bed-trick in the Tristram and Isolde romance.[171] The attempt by Isolde to kill the substitute bride (her maid, Brangane) in case she spills the beans is a precursor to Beatrice-Joanna's cruel treatment of her maid in *The Changeling*. Some stories were adapted for the English stage, such as Boccaccio's tale of Giletta and Beltram (*Decameron* III.9); Shakespeare used its delayed consummation and bed-trick plot as the basis for *All's Well That Ends Well*. There were sources in religious narratives too. The ascetic bridal-chamber rejection of sex found in various saints' lives are echoed in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon, as I demonstrate in Chapter 6. The Bible has its share of tragic (or tragicomic) nuptial narratives: Jacob is beguiled into marriage by means of a substitute-bride bed-trick; Samson weds a Philistine bride in an exogamous match that ends in slaughter; and Tobias drives an evil spirit from the bridal-chamber of Sara (one that has slain seven previous bridegrooms) on their wedding night. Lost plays – tragicomedies, it seems – based on Samson and Tobias were staged in 1602 by the Admiral's Men.[172] The Tobias story was, as noted above, popular and influential in the middle-ages; scholastics suggested that the first seven grooms were slain for concupiscent desire, whereas Tobias represents faith-based sexual temperance. As we shall see in the next chapter, a 'Toby Night' custom of sexual restraint is important to the first 'wedding night tragedy', *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*.

One other source or archetype to consider is what occurs at the 'Institution of marriage', as it is glossed in the King James Bible. Is the first marriage a 'tragic

[170] Herrick 1965: 293.
[171] See Doniger 2000: 277.
[172] See Wiggins Vol. IV 2014: entries 1333 and 1338.

wedding'? Chapter 1 of Genesis contains the injunction for Adam and Eve to 'Be fruitful, and multiply'; Chapter 2 ends with them 'naked… and not ashamed', primed to become 'one flesh'; Chapter 3 describes the temptation and Fall; Chapter 4 begins 'And Adam knew Eve his wife'. Did sex begin before or after the Fall? *After* was the majority view, even among those who defended marital sex as natural and holy, as opposed to a shameful act that was itself a cause or consequence of the Fall. (Milton was unusual in suggesting a consummated union within Eden.)[173] For some, 'tragedy is seen to reside at the heart of the first marriage'.[174] It is a tragedy that, by implication, obeys the dramatic unities, taking place on mankind's first day, which is also the wedding day. A 'temptation scene' occurs between solemnization and consummation, with the serpent as a bestial or libertine antagonist to the god-like hero. Unlike in much 'wedding night tragedy', the newlyweds proceed to sexual congress, albeit with a new sense of shame. Some anti-marriage ascetics considered this union a tragedy in itself: the generative cycle merely bred sinners for death. Even the pro-marriage St. Augustine felt that the *true* consummation intended by God – a disciplined union devoid of violent, libidinous passions – had been debased and would not be known until the City of God had been established.[175] It is an idea that makes of human history a 'displaced consummation' narrative both epic and tragic. The early modern period saw its own extensive debate over a paradisal sexuality felt to be 'associated in some obscure but powerful way both with God's supreme blessing and with the most terrible transgression'.[176] No dramatist of the era shows a Miltonian preoccupation with the marital eroticism of the first couple, but several draw on the Edenic paradigm, suggesting that hymeneal embraces offer a restoration of paradise – and hence are vulnerable to infernal attack. I consider this discourse in plays such as *Othello*, *The Changeling* and *Thierry and Theodoret*.

A potential risk in highlighting narremes as chronotopes is in conveying a sense of inevitability about their persistence. Likewise, an emphasis on historical context might make the appearance of particular tropes seem to follow automatically. After all, the periods in which a 'tragic wedding' convention flourishes tend to coincide with strong legislative pushes for social control over marriage and sexuality: Periclean

[173] *Paradise Lost* IV.689-775.
[174] Belsey 2001: 68.
[175] See Brown 1988: Chap. 19; Greenblatt 1980: 242.
[176] Turner 1993: 39.

Athens, Augustan Rome, Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe. Other conditions need to pertain, however, for a *dramaturgical* treatment of the theme to arise; the medieval period, for example, saw ongoing marital legislation but limited opportunities for theatrical expression. It took a renaissance of classical oratory and theatrical forms to bring 'tragic wedding' plots and motifs to the stage. But here too there is nothing inevitable about their manifestation on the English stage, where the tragic focus on the wedding night is unique in its erotic or murderous intensity.

A brief demonstration of this distinctiveness can be seen in the death scene of the heroine in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. In 1925, an Italian critic, Piero Rébora, asked 'Ah, why on earth can no Italian tragedy in seven centuries of national literature boast of a scene so pathetic, so intensely human, so exquisitely poetical as this…?'[177] Whilst Webster's play does not depict a fatal nuptial night – on the contrary, the Duchess and Antonio enjoy a fulfilling marital relationship for some years after their witty and radiantly erotic exchange of vows – the use of 'tragic wedding' motifs is nevertheless a significant factor in the play's affective appeal. The tragedy stems directly from a clandestine match, with the Duchess warned by her brothers that 'The marriage night/ Is the entrance into some prison.' (1.2.239-40). In her seminal essay, 'The "Impure Art" of John Webster', Inga-Stina Ekeblad points to the inversions by which the wooing exchange is figured as death-marked and the Duchess's death scene as an *unmarrying* rite, with the madmen's masque serving as a blackly comic retrospective charivari.[178] Charles Forker, noting Webster's use of bed/tomb tropes, remarks that the tormenting of the Duchess in Act 4 'perverts the rituals of marriage into a series of atrocities'.[179] And M. C. Bradbrook suggests, plausibly in my view, that the final 'prison' scene may have been another bedchamber scene – one to complement the extraordinary domestic intimacy of Act 3.2 – in which the Duchess finds that 'the coffin has indeed replaced the nuptial bed'.[180]

Thomas Middleton attests to the greatness of Webster's play by noting that none who saw it 'could get off under a bleeding eye' – could depart, that is, without eyes

[177] Quoted in Herrick 1965: 177.
[178] Ekeblad 1968 (first pub. 1958).
[179] Forker 1986: 351.
[180] Bradbrook 1980: 153-4.

bloodshot from weeping.[181] Given the evidence of emotionally charged responses to plays such as *Othello* and *The Maid's Tragedy* – discussed in Chapters 3 and 6 – it is my contention that the 'tragic wedding' theatregram is employed in some of the era's most moving dramatic works. The affective power is not, of course, down to any one factor; the major late-Elizabethan literary achievements 'succeed by the internal accumulation of literary components', thus overgoing the 'classical, native and continental materials that are their models'.[182] The 'tragic wedding' convention should be recognised, though, as a crucial component when we consider the means by which English playwrights produced love (and sex) tragedy that still provides the high-water mark for such drama four centuries later. According to Kenneth Burke, '*Form* in literature is an arousing and fulfillment of desires'.[183] As I demonstrate in the following chapters, a number of early modern plays exemplify Burke's axiom in a paradoxical fashion, as affective structures in which the *thwarting* of desire on the wedding night is the fulcrum or climax of a tragic action.

[181] From Middeton's commendatory verse for the First Quarto. Steggle 2007: 98 notes that some authors held 'a theatre all in tears as an acme of theatrical achievement'.
[182] Smith 1994: 2.
[183] Burke 1968: 124.

CHAPTER 2

Tragic Wedding Plots and Motifs in Elizabethan Drama

In this chapter I initially consider the emergence of a 'tragic wedding' convention in the work of various Elizabethan dramatists across a range of genres, addressing the incorporation of classical sources in populist theatre, and the unlocking of erotic possibility in stories that focus on marriage and defloration, particularly in the late 1580s and early 90s. I then look closely at the theme of nuptial revenge in *Titus Andronicus* and *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* – the latter of which can be counted, I suggest, as the first 'wedding night tragedy'.

The extant drama of the period implies a gradual evolution of a 'tragic wedding' convention, though it might be that lost plays would reveal a somewhat fuller picture. Arthur Brooke refers in his preface to *Romeus and Juliet* (1562) to having seen a dramatization of the story, one which would, presumably, have presented wedding rites becoming funeral rites when Juliet is found apparently dead on the day of her marriage to Paris[1] – Brooke's poem touches on these 'maimed rites'. There were university and court productions of neoclassical tragedies in Latin based on 'fatal marriages': *Dido*, *Masinissa and Sophonisba* and *Procne* were all performed before Elizabeth I in 1564-66.[2] The latter opened with Diomedes ascending from hell with flames on his head, feet and arms – the embodiment of a diabolical nuptial-torch – to foretell a tragic marital fate for his descendants. Over the next two decades, comedy and romance were the predominant genres; some of the plays would almost certainly have contained 'broken nuptial' and 'delayed consummation' plots, particularly those that, as Stephen Gosson put it, 'ransackt' Heliodorus. In general, though, the theatregram seems to have been at an embryonic stage.

[1] See Wiggins 2012: Vol. I, entry 343 on the lost play.
[2] Wiggins 2012: Vol. I, entries 383, 394 and 431. Wiggins gives likely plot summaries for lost plays.

The Disobedient Child (c.1560), a moral interlude by Thomas Ingelend, is a good example of the nascent form. A feckless young man marries against the advice of his father who urges him to complete his education first. The 'wanton boy' (46) cannot wait, however, despite the threat of being disowned. He splashes out (with borrowed money) on a wedding feast that turns into a drunken, appetitive free-for-all – a naturalistic centrepiece that anticipates later Elizabethan drama. In their extravagant nuptial joy, the groom and his 'mincing trull' (64) of a bride list the sportive delights of marriage. There is no sense of solemnity here. The uninvited father broods on the hardships that await the irresponsible pair, quoting the misogynous ancient Greek poet, Hipponax, to claim that there are two days of pleasure in marriage: 'The first is the joy of the marriage-day and night,/ The second to be at the wife's sepulture' (69). He predicts that his son will one day envy Ovid's Eupolis and his wife who 'The night they were wedded, fell for a vengeance;/ Who with the heavy ruin of the bed were slain' (69).[3] No tragedy occurs at the wedding itself, but the play circles around the idea. When the young man finds himself in poverty, chained to a shrewish, violent wife, he does indeed wish 'On my marriage day to have died with a fever', or, 'That would God, the hour when I was married,/ In the midst of the church I might have sinked' (78, 86). The moral message is driven home when the repentant son seeks aid from his father, only to be met with an uncompromising (if not entirely unsympathetic) rebuff. And that is that. The couple have made their bed and must lie in it. It is not much of a story, but another dimension is felt with the appearance of Satan to gloat over their matrimonial hell. He claims responsibility for it – the Devil, as the Prayer Book proposes, makes it his special business to sow dissent in marriage. Are we to see the couple, then, as the victims of metaphysical malice? *The Disobedient Child* scarcely makes us feel this on the pulse, but it does hold incipient dramaturgical possibilities, particularly in its sense of the wedding as a transition rite vulnerable to diabolical incursion.

The first clear 'broken nuptial' plot in extant Elizabethan drama is found in Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* (c.1569). The play is notorious for the barbarous mingling of kings and clowns so deplored by Sidney – though its blend of farce, pathos and sensationalism offers more of a template for mature Elizabethan tragedy than any

[3] The Cambridge-educated Ingelend's allusions are intriguingly obscure, and suggest a genuine attentiveness to classical precedence with regard to 'tragic wedding' motifs.

model of neoclassical correctness. The nuptial plot is rudimentary. Towards the end of the play, Cambyses, the tyrannical king of Persia, falls in love with his cousin, insisting on immediate marriage despite her resistance. Ambidexter, the famous Vice, describes the 'sport upon sport' (231) of their wedding, expressing similar (if less pious) concerns over hasty marriage and lavish expenditure to those found in Ingelend's play. Setting up the banquet, Ambidexter teasingly primes the audience for nuptial disaster: 'Have ye no doubt but all shall be well' (234). During the feast, Cambyses tells a story that prompts his bride to a tearful condemnation of his tyranny. Outraged at the criticism, the king condemns his bride with a line that captures the perversion of marriage ritual: 'I give consent and make a vow, that thy shalt die the death' (238). Two lords plead for the queen, emphasising her virtue, beauty and erotic appeal as 'A precious pearl of price to prince, a jewel passing all' (240), but their arguments are to no avail: she must die on her wedding day. Before she is led away by Cruelty and Murder, the queen sings a psalm of forgiveness for the king, a virginal intercession that makes her a precursor to tragic brides such as Desdemona. That her bridal sorrows are meant to move the audience is suggested by the mock-tearful response of Ambidexter – often counted a double-tongued forebear of Iago – whose boo-hooings only work as comedy if they puncture a genuinely touching moment. Again, this seems to anticipate later 'tragic wedding' dramaturgy: the emotive endings of plays such as Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* or Dekker's *The Noble Spanish Soldier* are pricked by comic interjections. 'Broken nuptial' designs were to become far more sophisticated, but they all owe a debt to Preston's 'lamentable tragedy mixed ful of pleasant mirth'.[4]

An extant 1583 Latin version of the Dido story seems to stand as a bridge between neoclassical and popular dramaturgy with regard to the emergent theatregram. *Dido* was written by William Gager for the visit of Queen Elizabeth and the Polish Palatine to Oxford, and its lavish staging 'created something of a splash'.[5] The production included a Senecan ghost – that of Sychaeus, Dido's late husband, who appears 'bearing before me in my left hand a gloomy torch for the new bridal-chamber of

[4] From Q1 title page.
[5] Sutton 1994: 250.

Elisa' (299).[6] The play's editor finds the apparition 'superfluous',[7] yet it clearly signals the 'fatal marriage' theme just before Dido and Aeneas shelter in a cave (the 'bridal-chamber') from a '*storm caused by Juno*' (301). The stage direction is minimalist, but we know from Holinshed's account that the effects were spectacular: 'it hailed small confects, rained rosewater, and snew an artificiall kind of snow, all strange, marvellous, and abundant'.[8] Frederick Boas is sniffy about the prettified staging,[9] suggesting that it is at odds with the ill-omened tempest and the accompanying Nymphs' Lament: 'Alas for the wedding, alas for the evil marriage' (301). There may, however, have been a deliberate attempt to juxtapose the ominous song with romantic atmospherics appropriate to the consummation of what Dido (at least) considers a legitimate marriage. The debate that follows about its legitimacy was as significant for early modern England as it had been for Augustan Rome; in both societies, a tragic breach in matrimonial rites might be held to put the world out of joint. Travestied nuptials, spectacularly staged and rooted in classical iconography, would soon be part of popular dramaturgy. The involvement of George Peele in the production of *Dido*, perhaps as an advisor with London playhouse experience, is noteworthy here;[10] Peele would become, as we shall see, a key figure in developing a 'tragic wedding' convention as part of the professional repertoire.

Some of the constituent elements in the theatregram start to appear in extant popular drama from the mid-1580s, most significantly in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c.1587). Kyd's combination of revenge and romance is a major development on the English stage. Hieronimo's son, Horatio, has been murdered as a social and sexual upstart who gets in the way of a proposed dynastic marriage. Hieronimo, the master-of-revels at court, famously uses a wedding entertainment as the vehicle for revenge. As noted in the previous chapter, the bridegroom, Balthazar, who has his rival's blood on his hands, experiences generic anxiety when presented with the playlet's tragic plot: 'methinks a comedy were better' (4.1.149). Humanist wedding masques and oratory were hugely important in promoting the matrimonial idealism of the

[6] Elisa is the alternative name for Dido; Gager emphasises it in order to draw a flattering contrast in the Epilogue with 'our Eliza' who has prudently avoided an exogamous match.
[7] Sutton 1994: 355. Cf. the ghost of Agrippina in the post-Senecan *Octavia*.
[8] Quoted in Sutton 1994: 242.
[9] See Sutton's note to III.575sd.
[10] Gager also worked with an unknown collaborator in the writing of the play. Peele has been proposed as the second writer but Sutton 1994: 249 considers this no more than a 'tantalizing possibility'.

Renaissance; here, though, we see how such idealism might be abused in the name of powerful interests. Hieronimo's project – one of heartfelt engagement and metatheatrical detachment – is to negate an evil union. The classical template for the inversion of ceremony is signalled in an ominous dumb-show ahead of the marriage, the meaning of which is explained by the personified figure of Revenge:

> The two first the nuptial torches bore
> As brightly burning as the midday's sun,
> But after them doth Hymen hie as fast,
> Clothed in sable and a saffron robe,
> And blows them out and quencheth them with blood,
> As discontent that things continue so 3.15.29-34.

Hymen's costume presages the nuptial tragedy in itself, the marriage-god's traditional saffron robe being worn with funereal sable. To see the wedding brands extinguished might have reminded educated spectators of similar motifs in Seneca and Ovid, but Revenge's explication ensures that the meaning will not be lost on anyone; an education of the wider playhouse audience is at hand. Intertextual echoes are still heard some fifty years later when we hear revengers threaten to 'quench all/ The smiling tapers with his blood' or to 'dead [the nuptial torch]/ With blood into a sickly glimmering taper'.[11]

The tragic nuptial topos is seen again in some of the dumb-shows of *Locrine* (c.1591), a play probably written by Robert Greene,[12] one of a wave of scholar-playwrights – 'university wits' – recruited by the players in the 1580s. Act 1 of *Locrine* ends with a funeral and a wedding, one of many such ritual juxtapositions in early modern drama. The marriage of the newly-crowned king, Locrine, is interrupted, however, by news of invasion, an action that (ultimately) brings military victory but marital woe. The dumb-show that follows depicts Até, goddess of mischief, presiding over the riot at the wedding-banquet of Perseus and Andromeda – an ill omen for Locrine's seemingly happy union.[13] A later dumb-show is used to signal matrimonial revenge: Medea, again under the auspices of Até, places a garland on the head of Jason's new bride before setting it on fire and killing them both, a variation on Euripides and

[11] Shirley, *The Cardinal* 4.2.69-70; Harding, *Sicily and Naples* 3.6 (p.95, Roberts edition).
[12] Murphy 2009 makes a strong case for Greene's authorship.
[13] The source is Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Book 5, 1-249. The choice is not entirely apt since the Perseus-Andromeda marriage is not actually a 'fatal' one.

Seneca. Like Medea, Locrine's wife takes revenge against her unfaithful husband, though not on the wedding day. *Locrine* cannot be counted as *nuptial* tragedy per se, as it does not revolve around the wedding day, but the playwright suggests that the king's marriage is doomed from the start: 'this foule accursed day/ Is the beginning of his miseries' (450-1). The between-act dumb-shows are modelled on neoclassical drama, and hence have a scholarly cachet. Again, they serve to familiarise audiences for the populist repertory with 'fatal marriage' archetypes: Até, like Kyd's Revenge, explains the significance of the action. The between-act device did not catch on in populist drama, but it was adapted by a number of professional playwrights who used dumb-shows to move the main action along, particularly where ceremonials are required. 'Tragic wedding' themes are conveyed in this way in plays such as Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (2.1, 3.1), Dekker's *Match Me in London* (5.3), and Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (4.1) – the latter with its strikingly original (if still Senecan) ghost at the wedding.

Another play by Greene, *James the Fourth* (1590), is of interest in structural terms as a nuptial tragicomedy. The play opens (after a prologue) on the wedding day of the Scottish king, James, and the English princess, Dorothea. The public ceremony emphasises the political importance of the union. A lengthy aside from James, however, brings more private concerns to the fore: he has fallen for a Scottish noblewoman, Ida, during the marriage ceremony itself – 'Even in the Chapel did thy fancy change' (1.1.82). The dramatic timing here is Greene's invention, and not found in his source.[14] James feels that his 'nuptial knot is death', and is unwilling to commit to monogamy: 'there's some choice in two' (75, 131). He soon succumbs to the flattery of the machiavel, Ateukin, who promises to win Ida for him. The bond established between the two men is, arguably, the real breach in the marriage: Ateukin's praise of the king's looks and wit – 'O God, how am I ravished in your worth!' – has a sexual ring, whilst James's response, 'love must have ease', may well have homoerotic implications despite being spoken about Ida (276-7). They depart the stage in cahoots; the next scene opens with a bawdy exchange between would-be servants which suggests that phallic endowment is what will gain employment at the Scottish court: the play trades on rumours about the (recently married) James VI of

[14] See Sanders 1970: xxix-xxxiii.

Scotland's susceptibility to male favourites.[15] As in a number of romance narratives, a space opens up between vow and consummation for other sexual possibilities to intrude. Later in the play, for example, in a near-tragic action, Dorothea is stabbed while on the run in male attire; in the comic scenes that ensue, the woman who nurses Dorothea back to health becomes smitten with what she thinks is a man. The debt to romance tradition is clear, but is this actually a 'delayed consummation' plot? Greene makes no reference to the wedding night itself. At one point it is acknowledged that the royal couple are 'knit in one', which could refer to a sexual union, but James's initial thought to 'estrange my love' might suggest that he keeps from the marriage-bed entirely (2.1.130, 1.1.173). After the wedding, James and Dorothea do not appear onstage together until the end when, with battle about to commence between Scotland and England, an eleventh-hour reconciliation is made between them – the king repents of his sins, and the queen shows a saint-like forbearance (as she does throughout). They are, in a sense, wedded anew, amid feast and frolic, whilst the flatterer, Ateukin, is hunted down to serve as the scapegoat. Marriage ceremony provides a structural frame in which the dominant matrimonial discourse is reasserted – but not before the 'broken nuptials' create indeterminacy and uncertainty, a narrative lacuna in which sexual personae proliferate.

Christopher Marlowe's 'fatal marriage' play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (c.1588),[16] displays a similar erotic multivalency. There is no delayed or disrupted consummation here, but – as in *The Duchess of Malfi*, where another widow takes the lead in forming a clandestine nuptial union – the rapturous fulfilment of desire is shot through with tragic presentiment. The play is important to the 'tragic wedding' theatregram for its tone, language and stagecraft. Marlowe blends the ardent solemnity of his Virgilian and Ovidian sources with mock-heroic sexual farce, adding a series of satirical erotic exchanges that raise questions about desire and marriage – and create a new brand of 'interrogative drama' in the process.[17] This is seen particularly in the play's divine superstructure: in the opening scene, for example, Jupiter dandles Ganymede, 'that female wanton boy', on his knee, symbolically entering a bigamous union when he gives him the 'linkèd gems,/ My Juno wore upon her marriage-day' (1.1.42-3, 51).

[15] Sanders 1970: xxvii, xxxiv-v.
[16] Wiggins' 'best guess' for the date (2012: Vol. II, 820), but see Lunney 2016 on the extensive debate over dating.
[17] Deats 2004: 199.

'The adulterous Ganymede has replaced Juno as Jupiter's spouse'.[18] Marlowe has been seen as 'opposing the rites of Hymen' on various grounds[19] – homoerotic, atheist-materialist, republican – and 'royal marriage-rites' (4.2.16) are indeed rejected in *Dido*. Yet marriage formation by means of *private* ritual is approved, despite, or perhaps because of, the risks involved.[20] Marlowe accentuates the hubris in Dido's over-reaching romantic aspiration – 'make me immortal with a kiss'[21] – but insists on the heroism as well as the folly of her Icarus-like flight to 'melt' in orgasm (4.4.123, 5.1.245). As with Leander's swimming of the Hellespont, the liberating and the self-sacrificing act are one and the same. Marlowe presents erotic freedom as circumscribed, whether by fate or society, but his tragic heroes bid to transcend these limits, manifesting 'the will to absolute play'.[22] Patrick Cheney calls Marlowe's clear-sighted treatment of doomed passion the 'skeptical sublime' and, writing on *Dido*, finds its rhapsodic expression 'the tragedy's most lasting legacy'.[23] It is a legacy that influences the rhetoric of lovers and libertines alike in the 'wedding night tragedies' that were to follow.

Another influential aspect of *Dido* is its bold staging of erotic intimacy.[24] Unlike the neoclassical decorum of Gager, who keeps the storm-driven liaison of Dido and Aeneas offstage, Marlowe presents his lovers together in subterranean privacy, turning the cave into a surrogate bridal chamber. Sexual tension is gradually raised until Dido's impulsive outburst, 'O Aeneas, quench these flames!' (3.4.22), her ardency foreshadowing the funeral pyre. When Aeneas pledges on his sword 'Never to like or love any but [Dido]', the Carthaginian queen offers him a sensual empire – 'Stout love, in mine arms make thy Italy'– and gives him jewels and a 'wedding-ring,/ Wherewith my husband wooed me yet a maid' (50, 56, 61-2). Dido even, somewhat ghoulishly, renames him after her first husband: ''Sichaeus', not 'Aeneas', be thou

[18] Orvis 2011:109
[19] Cheney 1997: 179.
[20] Marlowe returns to this theme repeatedly, most famously in *Hero and Leander*. The lovers exchange vows and gifts, but a lack of solemnization becomes central to Chapman's continuation of the epyllion, which employs much 'tragic wedding' imagery – as indeed does Musaeus's Greek original.
[21] The same phrase appears in *Doctor Faustus* in the Helen of Troy sequence (5.1.91).
[22] Greenblatt 1980: 193ff.
[23] Cheney 2009: 42, 87.
[24] Its publication in 1594 has a bearing on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with its comic supernatural interventions in mortal erotic life, and on the rhapsodic intimacies of *Romeo and Juliet*.

called' (58). Such gift-giving details are not found in the sources;[25] Marlowe adds them to stress that a legitimate, if clandestine, marriage has taken place (the audience serves, in a sense, as witness). Consent is followed by consummation, or what Iarbus, the rejected romantic rival, calls 'sporting in this darksome cave… the ugly cave' (4.1.24-32). The vaginal implication here is sounded again in the tragic denouement. The first thing that Dido burns in her unmarrying rites is the phallic 'sword that in the darksome cave/ He drew, and swore by to be true to me' (5.1.295-6). Theatrical spaces and properties carry an erotic charge, similar to that in the bower scene (2.4) of *The Spanish Tragedy* (also notable for its sympathetic take on reckless clandestine love). Dido's self-immolation in the fiery pit – presumably the trap – both re-enacts and effaces the passionate bridal-chamber union.

The Marlowe plays in which 'broken nuptial' structures are utilised are *The Massacre at Paris* (c.1593), which I touched on in the previous chapter, and *Edward the Second* (c.1591-2). The latter's episodic nature makes it far from obvious that it is structured as a *nuptial* tragedy, though it is clear that Marlowe is concerned with marital and sexual relations during Edward's 'troublesome reign'. This is another play that responds to reports about James VI of Scotland (predicted by many to be the next king of England), and the play opens with Edward's invitation to his male favourite: 'come, Gaveston,/ And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend' (1.1.1-2). This 'Come live with me' imperative sounds like a proposal of royal marriage. When, later in Act 1, Gaveston's political enemies secure his banishment, it leads to a breach between Edward and his wife, Queen Isabella, who finds herself wishing that

> at the marriage-day
> The cup of Hymen had been full of poison,
> Or with those arms that twined about my neck
> I had been stifled, and not lived to see
> The king my lord thus to abandon me 1.4.173-177.

Her retrospective 'tragic wedding' fantasy is notable for envisaging both a public death (at the nuptial feast) and a private eroticised one (in the bridal bed) – rather like the mix in *The Disobedient Child*. This soliloquy is likely to attract sympathy for Isabella, although she is already allying herself politically and romantically with the

[25] See Deats 1998: 168-9 on Marlowe's new emphasis on gift-giving.

brutal Mortimer.[26] The queen shows guile when, in a bid to regain her husband's favour, she secures a repeal for Gaveston whilst plotting his destruction. As Richard Rowland observes, 'In both motivation and chronology this is a radical departure from the sources, since neither Isabella nor Mortimer was in fact involved in Gaveston's downfall'.[27] This is a considered reshaping of the events. On hearing of the repeal, a grateful Edward proclaims a 'second marriage' between himself and Isabella (1.4.334), then immediately announces that he has arranged to marry his niece to Gaveston. Ostensibly, normative heterosexual relations are re-established, but Marlowe again makes a substantive chronological change, in that the historical Gaveston was married long before his exile. The dramaturgical purpose is to create a 'second marriage' that is, in effect, a same-sex union. When Edward calls for a 'general tilt and tournament', stating that he himself 'in the triumph will be challenger' (375, 381), the erotic implication is not lost on his enemies. This is a marriage-of-convenience; as Stephen Orgel puts it, 'marriage here is fully complicit with homoeroticism'.[28] Hence the barons mount a rebellion on the wedding day, whilst the neglectful Edward and Gaveston engage in 'frolics' and 'sport' (2.3.17, 25). Gaveston escapes but, in the telescoped action, is hunted down and executed on his wedding night, having been 'divorcèd' from the king (2.5.3). Marlowe collapses time in bravura fashion throughout the play, but makes it clear that the Tynemouth sequence is a 'fatal marriage' event: Isabella hopes that Gaveston will 'this blessèd day be slain', whilst Gaveston's final lament points to the tragic timing: 'O, must this day be period of my life,/ Centre of all my bliss?' (2.4.69; 2.6.4-5).

The play has two major movements – the first builds to the 'broken nuptials' demise of Gaveston, the second to the mock-sodomitical murder of the king with a red-hot spit.[29] Edward's paramour, or spouse, in the second phase is the opportunistic Spencer, a former lover of Gaveston (the latter commends Spencer to the king at the wedding). Even as Edward learns of Gaveston's death, he takes up with 'sweet Spencer', embracing him when the rebels call for their 'divorce' (3.1.144, 176). It might seem that Marlowe accentuates the king's fickleness with this sudden new 'marriage', yet the ensuing civil war and Edward's harsh retributive justice is figured

[26] Forker 1994: 53-4.
[27] Rowland 1994: xxvi.
[28] Orgel 1996: 46.
[29] Some have questioned the use of a spit, but see Forker's note to 5.5.30.

as a revenge for the murder of his former love, 'To whom right well you knew our soul was knit' (3.3.43). The homoerotic relations in the play are marked at times by manipulative self-interest, but also by passion and loyalty. Gaveston lives up to his sense of himself as Leander, risking all to 'die' on the king's bosom (1.1.14); when Edward and Spencer are captured in an abbey, disguised as monks, the king offers his heart as a sacrifice to save his friends. The abbey scene's plangent spiritual grace contains examples of the Marlovian erotic sublime, such as Spencer's grief-stricken 'Earth, melt to air; gone is my sovereign' (4.7.103). This is in stark contrast to the callous machinations of Isabella and Mortimer. Edward's complaint that his wife 'spots my nuptial bed with infamy' (5.1.31) is hypocritical, but Marlowe shows the far greater hypocrisy of Isabella when she sends Edward a jewel in prison to give him false hope. Her treacherous gift is another unmarrying rite; the jewel is, presumably, the one Edward parts with in a poignant attempt to buy off his assassin. The infamous murder, a regicidal rape carried out in the excremental bowels of a castle, again sees the eroticization of stage space and props. The bedchamber scenes of plays such as *Othello*, *The Maid's Tragedy* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* owe something not only to its shocking corporeality but also to its terrible nuptial negation.

Edward the Second stands as a riposte to the normative moral design of Greene's *James the Fourth*.[30] The battleground is one of marital and sexual ideology. Elizabethan playwrights searched chronicles and romances for stories with contemporary social or political resonance, and selected with increasing frequency those that involved matrimonial tragedy. In shaping this material for the stage, they drew upon classical precedents, but also began to devise their own 'broken nuptial' structures, condensing, expanding or altering materials to their own particular ends. George Peele, for example, had a strong anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic animus. In *Edward I* (c.1591), he makes the king's Spanish wife, Elinor, an arch-villainess, and has her confess on her death-bed that the day before she married Edward she slept with his brother, 'Uppon my bridal couch' (2475). This pre-nuptial transgression is an unhistorical calumny. Nationalistic and religious prejudices are also in evidence in another of Peele's chronicle plays, *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*

[30] Rowland 1994: xix-xxiii.

(1589-90),[31] which sees the 'sweet bridal' (Pt.1. 5.5) designed to unite England and France in peace fractured by the arrival of a cardinal sent by the Pope. War breaks out anew over a religious dispute; Peele shapes the historical material so that the Catholic man-of-God presides over division rather than union, leaving the bride to sorrowfully ask her groom:

> And will your Grace upon your wedding day
> Forsake your bride and follow dreadful drums Pt.1. 5.140-1.

Shakespeare, who follows Peele closely for many features of his own *King John* (c.1595), extends this nuptial set-piece. The bride implores the groom not to fight against his new kin in an inhumane breach of ceremony:

> Upon thy wedding day?
> Against the blood that thou hast marrièd?
> What, shall our feast be kept with slaughtered men?
> Shall braying trumpets and loud churlish drums,
> Clamours of hell, be measures of our pomp?
> O husband, hear me. 3.1.300-05

King John of England, holding hands throughout the scene with the king of France, asks if the cardinal intends that they should

> snatch our palm from palm,
> Unswear sworn faith, and on the marriage-bed
> Of smiling peace to march a bloody host,
> And make a riot on the gentle brow
> Of true sincerity? O holy sir,
> My reverend father, let it not be so. 3.1.244-8

This 'broken nuptial' substitutes war for peace, discord for harmony, violence for love; should the marriage bed become a battlefield, its sheets will be marked by slaughter, not the hymeneal blood of a sanctified consummation. The marriage metaphor appears here in a largely political context, but the scene as a whole suggests how far the ideologies and affairs of church and state can intrude on actual lovers in their moment of union.

[31] This anonymous work has been convincingly ascribed to Peele – see Forker 2011.

The ‘tragic wedding’ elements of these Elizabethan moralities, romances, histories, and revenge tragedies form a bedrock for the theatregram’s exponential development in early seventeenth-century drama. In many later plays there is a continued focus on ‘maimed rites’, on ceremonies subject to violation as matches are made or unmade. But there is a gradual shift of focus, as suggested in the second of the Shakespeare extracts, from the wedding day to the wedding night, from the public to the private, from the banquet to the bed. This latter notion is significant when it comes to the plays I consider in the remainder of this chapter, plays in which disturbing or negating the nuptial consummation is the specific aim of rivals and revengers.

‘MAY THE DEVIL TAKE YOU’: NUPTIAL REVENGE IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS* AND *ALPHONSUS, EMPEROR OF GERMANY*

Few people now treat *Titus Andronicus* (c.1593-4) as another author’s ‘heap of rubbish’ to which Shakespeare only added ‘a few master touches’,[32] a view that long held sway. On the contrary, Shakespeare is sometimes seen as the sole author, or, more frequently now, ‘given credit for the overall conception’ in a collaboration with Peele.[33] The 1598 attribution of the play to Shakespeare by Francis Meres, and its inclusion in the First Folio, tend to support such a view. Brian Vickers, who makes the fullest (and most convincing) case for Peele and Shakespeare as co-authors, argues, however, for an early 1590s collaboration in which the pair ‘shared the planning of the whole play’.[34] He surmises a Peelean influence on the overall plot, given his propensity for staging violence in populist works that ‘revel in human cruelty’;[35] it is certainly the case that the horrors of *Titus* – rape, mutilation, torture, sacrifice, suicide – all have parallels in other works by Peele. I favour this view; indeed, there remains a possibility (rejected too readily by Vickers, perhaps) that Shakespeare revised a pre-1590 Peele original,[36] as he appears to have done in *King*

[32] From Ravenscroft’s address ‘To the Reader’.
[33] Bevington 2011: xxviii.
[34] Vickers 2002: 161.
[35] Vickers 2002: 463.
[36] Jonson’s casual dating in the induction to *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) places *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* ‘five and twenty or thirty years’ previously (81-2). Many consider 1587 a likely date for Kyd’s play, which might attest to Jonson’s reliability.

John. Whether the published play is the product of a thoroughgoing collaboration or an extensive revision, its 'tragic wedding' design must have been a matter for discussion or deep consideration. The wedding *night* focus is fairly minimal, but it is, I believe, significant in terms of the emergent theatregram.

The opening of *Titus Andronicus*, attributed to Peele, is full of ceremonial spectacle, factional tension and bloody ritual. Disturbances are felt with regard to various customs – political, religious, nuptial, funerary – each impacting on the others. Peele (who translated one of Euripides' *Iphigenia* plays as a student) packs enough tragic matter for an ancient Greek trilogy into one Act. Marriage is the first thing on the mind of Saturninus when he is chosen as emperor of Rome, backed by Titus Andronicus. He shows his gratitude by selecting Titus's daughter, Lavinia, for his bride – a choice designed to spite his brother and political rival, Bassianus.[37] When the latter snatches Lavinia back, claiming a prior betrothal, Saturninus responds with a snap decision to marry Tamora, the captive queen of the Goths, since 'everything/ In readiness for Hymenaeus stand' (329-30). 'Stand' is a phallic *double entendre*: the emperor cannot wait to 'consummate our spousal rites' (342), referring to the ceremony but anticipating the night ahead. Tamora, intent on avenging her sacrificed son, jumps at the chance to be empress. Whilst she professes erotic submission to the emperor as 'handmaid… to his desires', her authority as 'mother to his youth' is immediately apparent (336-7). An onstage welter of 'maimed rites' ensues as the two weddings take place offstage. Returning, Saturninus, confident he has the better of the erotic bargain, greets his brother with a sarcastic 'God give you joy, sir, of your gallant bride' (405); Bassianus's response 'And you of yours' is full of foreboding. It is already clear that the emperor's hasty exogamous match is a 'fatal marriage', one that brings an implacable enemy to power in Rome.

Whilst wedding and bedding rites proceed offstage, the two brides become the focus of erotic ambitions voiced onstage. In an over-reaching Marlovian soliloquy, Aaron the Moor, knowing that Tamora is as 'fettered in amorous chains' to him as the emperor is to her, looks to 'mount aloft with [his] imperial mistress' (514, 512). Aaron spells out the political implications of the sexual hierarchy, casting himself, a

[37] Ray 1998 suggests that the rivalry links issues of marital and (republican) political consent.

black servant, as the virile power behind the throne. Tamora will use the marriage bed to take both personal and tribal revenge, her sirenical charms bringing Rome to 'shipwreck' (523). The subjugation of the city begins with the sexual conquest of its emperor. The other target for the Goths is Lavinia. Cities and nations have often been figured as chaste or virginal females upon whose honour the well-being of the state depends, and Lavinia, as 'Rome's rich ornament' (55), serves this symbolic function in the play.[38] A dispute breaks out between Tamora's sons, Demetrius and Chiron, over which will make Lavinia his mistress. In a desperate show of manhood, they draw swords against each other. Violent and sexual rites of passage frequently coincide in the drama of the era; here, significantly, they do so on the wedding night. We will see various playwrights engineer situations in which onstage violence is an analogue to the offstage 'amorous battle', or in which the energies of the latter are displaced by perverse alternatives. Aaron solves the dispute by suggesting a joint rape during the next day's hunt: 'it seems some certain snatch or so/ Would serve your turns' (595-6). He directs them to 'revel in Lavinia's treasury' (631), in an orgiastic pillage of Roman coffers. Marriage, on which the city-state and its empire depends, is imperilled by subversion from within and assault from without.

Ideas about the centrality of marriage to civil society were formulated in the ancient world but were of acute contemporary relevance in the Renaissance. The playworld of *Titus Andronicu*s is remote and pagan, but it is made familiar in the wedding night fracas with references to apprentices' clubs and players' wooden swords (536-41). The hunting scene that follows also has a decidedly Renaissance feel. Titus's first words 'The hunt is up' (2.1.1) are the title of a tune used to rouse newlyweds in early modern England.[39] The notion is literalised through '*a noise with hounds and horns*', but the celebratory rites are ominous since the audience knows that Lavinia is to be the prey. Ironic inversions of *post*-nuptial norms are important to the 'tragic wedding' convention, as we shall see. Clues are often given about what happened in the privacy of the bridal-chamber, as in this fleeting exchange:

> TITUS I promised your grace a hunter's peal.
> SATURNINUS And you have rung it lustily, my lords,
> Somewhat too early for new-married ladies.

[38] See Hadfield 2004: 126.
[39] Pearson 1957: 359; Ward 1979-1980: 9-11.

BASSIANUS Lavinia, how say you?

LAVINIA: I say no:

I have been broad awake two hours or more. 2.1.13-17

Saturninus's banter implies his own overnight prowess, whilst drawing attention to the brides, especially Lavinia, the woman who might have shared his bed. Bassianus, who earlier proclaimed his own 'continence' (1.1.15), clearly feels a response is called for. The exchange distinguishes between concupiscence and propriety, but what is the tone of Lavinia's reply? Critics have variously described her at this point as cool, stout or enigmatic.[40] Other options might, I suggest, be prim, bashful or amused. She appears pious and passive on public show in Act 1, yet her forthright condemnation of Tamora and Aaron in the forest displays an arch wit, and something of what Nicholas Brooke calls the 'beastliness of conscious virtue'.[41] There is no consensus over the authorship of the brief dawn scene,[42] but its indeterminacy – and concomitant sense of interiority – has, arguably, a Shakespearean feel, as does its capacity to encourage prurient speculation. It seems of little consequence in the brutal context of the play as a whole, and was cut in Edward Ravenscroft's 1678 adaptation of the play,[43] but the importance of inverted rites, however insignificant they appear, cannot be underestimated – as we shall see in plays such as *Othello*.

The post-nuptial significance is felt more fully in the forest scenes, of which Shakespeare was unquestionably the author. He provides further evidence of nuptial restraint – even, perhaps, of non-consummation, 'an abjuration of sexuality'.[44] The comparison of Bassianus's corpse to Pyramus 'bathed in maiden blood' (2.2.232) could imply a virginal death. The rape of Lavinia is described three times as a *deflowering* (2.2.191; 2.3.26; 5.3.38); this, together with references to her 'nice-preserved honesty' (2.2.135) and allusions to Philomela and Virginia (2.3.38; 5.3.37), might suggest that she is raped as a virgin.[45] That said, 'deflowered' is used about the rape of a 'silver-haired' (279) matron in Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*.[46] It is

[40] Royster 2000: 447; Belsey 2002: 135; Fawcett 1983: 266.
[41] Brooke 1968: 33-4. The implication in Brooke and others (Hattaway 1982: 198-9; Kahn 1997: 53, 64) that Lavinia precipitates the rape is questionable, given that it was planned ahead.
[42] Short scenes do not always provide enough evidence for secure attribution.
[43] To the detriment of the Restoration Lavinia, a figure of toneless virtue.
[44] Fawcett 1983: 267.
[45] See Bate's editorial note on the different versions of the Virginia story.
[46] Wives are threatened with deflowering in Webster and Heywood's *Appius and Virginia*, 4.2.150.

also used by Shakespeare in *The Rape of Lucrece* (348), about the virtuous Roman wife to whom Lavinia is also compared (at 1.1.608). Coppélia Kahn argues that the marital chastity of Shakespeare's Lucrece is so rarefied as to seem 'virginal or even unsexual', and that the holiness of her marital chastity 'has invested sex with a prelapsarian sinlessness'.[47] Lucrece and Lavinia seem to be cast in the same virtuous mould.[48] For Janice Valls-Russell the consummation of Lavinia and Bassianus's marriage is 'so recent that… it carries an image of near virginity'.[49] Might it be reasonable to assume that they did indeed consummate their marriage, but in a continent, almost austere, fashion?

Such surmises are anathema for some, as we will see in the debate over the consummation in *Othello*. But Shakespeare continually invites, or demands, prurient conjecture. What are we to make of Marcus Andronicus's thought, on meeting his brutalised niece, that she would have been an erotic prize for the kings who wooed her, even if they 'might not gain so great a happiness/ As half thy love' (2.3.20-21)? The implication is, I think, that less-than-half would still have been preferable to *all* of another woman's love. But does this point, unconsciously, to Lavinia's sexual reserve, or frigidity, suggesting that half of her love is the most she could have given? It seems to me that the Goths enact a violently libertine critique of a chaste Rome, where even the most desirable of brides might only offer a half-share of pleasure. Despoliation of marriage itself is a spur: 'This minion stood upon her chastity,/ Upon her nuptial vow' (124-5). In a grim equation, the double rape, with its division of spoils, nullifies the whole of Lavinia's modest love. Both the nuptial consummation and the rape occur offstage, but deictic aspects of the onstage action and dialogue create imaginative correspondences with what cannot be shown. Chiron's necrophilic plan to use Bassianus's corpse as a 'pillow to our lust' (2.2.130) – an anti-nuptial bed – is not carried out, but the idea, as Kahn suggests, 'travesties the marital chastity of which Lavinia boasts… by fusing the scene of marital consummation with the scene of rape'.[50]

[47] Kahn 1995: 26, 27. Cf. the 'holy, cold, and still conversation' of Octavia in *Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.6.122-3.
[48] The poem is roughly contemporaneous with *Titus*.
[49] Valls-Russell 2000: 67
[50] Kahn 1997: 53. See also Bate's note to 2.2.232.

The tragic synthesis of wedding night and rape is conveyed with creepy semiotic power when Lavinia's brothers fall into the pit where the murdered Bassianus lies. Bordering on farce, the scene can be unintentionally comic in performance, but some productions create an intense or even frightening atmosphere.[51] Various critics have explored the 'sexually overdetermined image of the pit as vagina, womb, tomb, and hell'.[52] The hymeneal implications are strongest in Quintus's lines:

> What, art thou fallen? What subtle hole is this,
> Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briers
> Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood
> As fresh as morning dew distilled on flowers?
> A very fatal place it seems to me. 2.2.198-201

The chthonic power of the 'swallowing womb' (239) does indeed prove fatal to the Andronici. Tamora's speech on the 'abhorred pit' endows it with hellish fertility, breeding the evils that pollute 'maiden blood', reducing chastity to an 'unhallowed and bloodstained hole' (98, 210). The image of 'the precious ring that lightens all this hole' worn upon Bassianus's 'bloody finger' (226-7) is a reminder of sanctified married love, but also suggests the synchronous phallic ransacking of 'Lavinia's treasury'. Rape is superimposed on nuptial union. The ring is compared to 'a taper in some monument', which links the pit to the 'household monument', or tomb, the symbol of Andronican family honour (2.2.228; 5.3.193).[53] Some modern productions use the same property or space for both pit and tomb.[54] That Lavinia is ultimately buried in the family tomb, rather than in her husband's, indicates a failed conjugal transition. She wears a veil for Act 5's vengeful banquet, which could be seen as a mock wedding feast.[55] The murder of Bassianus ends her brief marriage; a 'worse-than-killing lust' (2.2.175) sees their consummation suffer erasure; with her entrance into the tomb, it is as if she was never anything other than a bride-of-death.

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[51] See Dessen 1989: 56, 61.
[52] Kahn 1997: 68. See also Tricomi 1974: 17-18, Willbern 1978: 169-72, Gillies 1994: 106-8, James 1997: 58-60, 64.
[53] Hunter 1974: 7, D'Amico 1992: 66-7, and Kahn 1997: 52 highlight the central importance of the Andronici tomb.
[54] Eg. Peter Brook's famous 1955 production. It is usually assumed that the Elizabethans would have used a trap-door for the pit and a large property for the tomb.
[55] See Dessen 1989: 94 and Barker 2007: 101 on productions that underline the bridal resonance. Fawcett 1983: 262 and Ray 2004: 123-4 discuss the play's parodic wedding/hand imagery.

The sense of marriage under threat at the point of consummation is key to the developing 'tragic wedding' convention. In *Titus Andronicus*, sexual barbarians lay siege at the gates of chaste connubial love. But what if the latter ideal is bound up with ruthless imperialism or deathly sanctimony, whether in ancient Rome or the incipient empire centred on London? The clash of erotic values in the play has often produced conflicted responses, for all the prevailing sympathy for the mutilated Lavinia. The latter can be seen not only as a victim of rape but also of 'chaste thinking',[56] an ideology that holds sacrifice as the ultimate answer to defilement or shame. In Act 1, the 'cruel, irreligious piety' (1.1.133) of the Andronici means that an audience's initial sympathies could well be with Tamora as a grieving mother. The illicit passion she shares with Aaron has none of the hierogamous aspect found in *Antony and Cleopatra*, but the later play's favouring of the erotic, exotic Other – of fecund vitality over staid Roman chastity – makes for an interesting comparison.[57] Many find the machiavellian Aaron a charismatic figure of evil.[58] He too is described as 'irreligious', though his unrepentant scorn of 'base prayers' is the antithesis of Andronican devoutness (5.3.120, 184). Aaron's over-reaching, atheistic attack on convention derives from Marlowe, but the proto-Sadean war he and the Goths wage on chastity strikes a new note, one that subjects pietistic matrimonial ideals to a vicious inquisition.

The play was a major hit. Writing in 1614, Ben Jonson mocked those who still held such populist pot-boilers as '*Jeronimo* or *Andronicus*' in high esteem.[59] His own more 'stately-written' tragedies had failed on the stage. To an extent, Jonson's aesthetic judgement was sound – these are crazily sensationalistic works, overloaded and unmediated in their succession of bombastic, blood-curdling, antinomian thrills. But the affective and conceptual impact in the new amphitheatres was revolutionary. Within a decade of their major breakthroughs, Marlowe, Kyd, Greene and Peele had all died, but they – along with Shakespeare – had already created a theatre of huge rhetorical and semiotic power. One of their many legacies was to open up a new space in which to respond to and reckon with themes of sex and marriage. They reanimated

[56] From the title of Jed's 1989 book on Lucrece narratives.
[57] James 1997: 54 calls Tamora 'a seductive Cleopatra infiltrating Rome by marriage to the emperor'.
[58] See, for example, Barber and Wheeler 1986: 154-6, Gillies 1994: 110-12, and Bate's history of Aaron in later adaptations, 1995: 48-59.
[59] See note 36 above.

archetypal 'tragic wedding' tropes to address contemporary rites of passage; they imbued stage-spaces – pits, bowers, caves, tombs, dungeons – with a corporeal and gendered resonance; they created onstage and offstage analogues that compel an imaginative engagement with an array of sexual identities and ideologies. In their work, the consummation starts to become a focal point. The rape in *Titus Andronicus*, the play's defining event, is a negation of the wedding night. A revenge plot centred on nuptial rape is encountered in a similarly sensational play, *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, one that is usually dated c.1594, and has been attributed by some to Peele. Dating and authorship issues have dominated the discussion of the play; these are matters I address in Appendix I, related as they are to my claim that the play stands as the first out-and-out 'wedding night tragedy' of the era.[60]

As *Alphonsus* is a little-known play, it will be useful to sketch the wider situation within which the nuptial rape occurs. The title character is the tyrannical ruler of the German Empire,[61] a 'viperous, bloodthirsty Spaniard' (1.2.102) threatened with deposal by an assembly of seven Electors. One faction looks to replace him with Richard of Cornwall, brother to both the King of England, Henry III, and to the Empress Isabella, Alphonsus's wife. Richard travels to Germany having been promised the imperial crown. The move is blocked, however, by the Bishop of Mentz (bribed by Alphonsus) and the ambitious King of Bohemia; the latter is voted joint Emperor, declaring that there will be 'no crown nor empire/ For English islanders' (201-2). Alphonsus expediently engineers this power-sharing union whilst secretly plotting to retain an undivided empire. His unlikely machiavellian strategy involves murdering his secretary, Lorenzo, and persuading the latter's son, Alexander, that the blame lies with the Electors, who are in league with Richard and Isabella.[62] Alexander, who serves as Alphonsus's page, determines to avenge his father's death; in doing so, he becomes the emperor's unwitting political tool. When Richard arrives to a broken promise he shows outward patience but privately determines to seek redress and 'be crowned Emperor' (2.3.28). Travelling with him is his nephew, Prince Edward, the future Edward I, who hopes to marry Hedewick, the Duke of Saxon's famously beautiful daughter. Edward is outspoken over the affront to Richard, but his

[60] See also Desens 1994: 143-51 on the first bed-trick in extant English drama.
[61] Based on Alphonso X of Castile, but see Parrott 1910: 686-7 on the historical distortions.
[62] That Alphonsus's wife is 'sister to mine enemy' (1.1.20) is enough to condemn her.

grievances subside on falling in love with Hedewick during a masque to celebrate the imperial alliance. A match is swiftly arranged,[63] and the revels turn into extended wedding festivities. Lots are drawn to allocate carnivalesque roles, most of which involve high-low reversals, with noble elders reduced to comic butts. As in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the wedding entertainment serves a vengeful purpose: Alexander acts as master-of-ceremonies, whilst Alphonsus determines to 'send most actors in this pageant/ To revel it with Rhadamant in hell' (2.2.344-5).

The playwright handles the political machinations deftly, but what truly distinguishes the first half of the play is the subtlety with which it builds towards the nuptial bed-trick. Romantic comedy stems from Edward and Hedewick not speaking each other's language, and having different wooing and nuptial customs. English forwardness meets an apparent Germanic reserve. Edward greets Hedewick with a kiss only to be rebuffed: '*Dass dich!*' – 'May the devil take you' (2.2.91), which becomes something of a playful refrain. To kiss a German maid is a 'fault intolerable' (97). This is the cause of merriment amongst the company, at which Edward bridles, feeling himself infantilised, especially when told to ask her pardon:

> I hope to kiss her many thousand times
> And shall I go to her like a great boy,
> And say, I will do so no more? 2.2.132-4

All of this is breezily managed, but seems poignant in retrospect. Female shame and wounded manhood soon emerge as tragic themes; presumptuous kisses come to seem the most innocent of liberties, whilst careless oaths to the devil take on a sinister dimension; and Edward will indeed remain a 'great boy' in marital terms, unable to complete a sexual passage into adulthood. This minor dispute over decorum, played for laughs, prefigures the major breaches in ritual that lie ahead. Also poignant are the roles of Emperor and Empress adopted 'but for a day' by Edward and Hedewick in the revels (3.1.38). They sit enthroned 'sweetly billing, like two turtle-doves', but Edward also plays his 'dread' part with relish, and 'jets it through the court' in mock tyranny, an implied satire on Alphonsus (2.3.7; 3.1.46, 128). He is being artfully outperformed, however, not realising that 'but for a day' circumscribes his own connubial joy.

[63] The marriage depicted here has no historical basis.

The nuptial reversals of numerous plays, many rather better known than *Alphonsus*, are foreshadowed here. Few manage to build anticipation so successfully, particularly with regard to the consummation. When the revels take a drunken turn, Bohemia jokes 'You should consider what he has to do,/ His bride will give you little thanks to-night' (3.1.57-8). The issue of male performance on the nuptial night features prominently in many 'tragic wedding' plays. Edward, looking to measure up, asserts his manhood with some astronomical innuendo:

> And God will bless thee; I have a Jacob's staff
> Shall take the elevation of the pole;
> For I have heard it said the Dutch north-star
> Is a degree or two higher than ours. 3.1.87-90

No-one translates this for Hedewick's benefit. Edward's ribald bravado is spurred by the most crucial difference in nuptial custom: he has been informed of the Saxon tradition 'That the first night the bridegroom spares the bride' (62), a custom deriving from ancient patristic rules that urged newlyweds to spend the first night in prayer.[64] The playwright exploits this scenario superbly. Edward declares 'Old customs are but superstitions', contesting the practice in comical vein, though a tragicomic note (''Twixt jest & earnest') is struck when he issues a violent threat to a hypothetical person 'that would disjoin us two to-night' (73, 78-9). The audience is unaware as yet of Alphonsus's plans, but it is clear that the consummation is emerging as a focal point. Whilst Hedewick appears to stand on ceremony, others encourage Edward to treat the whole thing as a game:

> BOHEMIA Can they deceive you of your bride to-night,
> They'll surely do it, therefore look to yourself.
> EDWARD If she deceive me not, let all do their worst.
> ALPHONSUS Assure you, Emperor,[65] she'll do her best.
> EDWARD I think the maids in Germany are mad;
> Ere they be married they will not kiss,
> And, being married, will not go to bed. 3.1.93-9

A comic spirit prevails, especially when the groom is urged during a dance to steal away with his bride: 'Look to't, or else you'll lie alone tonight' (160). This is all part

[64] A rule ordained by the Council of Carthage, A.D. 398, based on the Old Testament 'Book of Tobit'.
[65] Edward is addressed here in his 'revels' role.

of a genial *comic* plot. Edward soon returns in night attire to relate how Hedewick did indeed deceive him, but not in any adulterous sense. He delivers a touching and finely detailed account of how the pair readied themselves for bed in the locked bridal chamber, of his 'lying in deep contemplation' of his bride as she ''gan for to unlace herself', of his shrinking 'out of my lukewarm place/ To make her room' – only for Hedewick, having kissed him 'lovingly', to make a pre-arranged signal and escape by means of a trap-door (3.1.222-39).

This bedchamber scenario could fit happily in a Restoration farce – though not without the breakthroughs in staging that come, as we shall see, in the early seventeenth century. Edward's sense of humour is tested by the good-natured confederacy, though he rallies, determined to search the palace until he finds her: 'I have good hope to ferret out her bed' (245). There is genuine warmth to the romantic comedy but, once again, much of the dialogue has a tragic resonance in retrospect, such as the reassurance 'She will be so much welcomer to-morrow' (242), or Edward's comic exasperation:

> But to be so deceiv'd, so over-reach'd,
> Even as I meant to clasp her in mine arms,
> The grief is intolerable, not to be guess'd 3.1.209-11.

The playwright's subtle device is to shadow the merry plot with a darker intrigue. Edward cannot guess that he is being 'over-reach'd' in another way entirely, nor sense the hubris in his challenge to 'let all do their worst', nor realise that the friendly warnings 'Look to't' and 'look to yourself' are unconsciously appropriate. A brief bedchamber intimacy is as close to conjugal fulfilment as Edward and Hedewick come, a brush with joy that sharpens their loss.

Alphonsus never mentions the bride and groom as targets for revenge until the bed-trick ploy is explained. Looking back, however, we can see how well the playwright lays the foundations. Alphonsus was first seen with 'the master-key of all the doors' (1.1.1), signifying his hold over the court and its secrets. He produces it now, tantalisingly repeating 'Seest thou this key?', urging Alexander 'now or never you must play the man', before directing him to the 'inner chamber/ Next to the chapel' (3.1.293, 297, 326-7). The key provides (phallic) access to the (vaginal) holy place

where Hedewick lies. The 'dainty trembling bride' will believe that Edward has found her out: 'By night all cats are grey' (328, 332). Alphonsus exhorts his page to

> Fall to thy business and make few words,
> And having pleas'd thy senses with delight,
> And fill'd thy beating veins with stealing joy,
> Make thence again before break of day.
> What strange events will follow this device
> We need not study on; our foes shall find.
> How now – how stand'st thou? – hast thou not the heart? 3.1.335-41

We can see parallels with Peele's section of *Titus*: a wily strategist plots rape, promising satisfaction to the youth(s) who will enact the crime, even if here the violation is a matter of cunning rather than force. The phrase 'stealing joy' is one I employ in the remainder of my study. It refers here to the transience of orgasmic bliss, but also carries a sense of the sadistic pleasure to be had in depriving another of erotic joy. The latter motive is one we will encounter in a variety of subsequent plays.

One of the impressive aspects of *Alphonsus* as a 'wedding night tragedy' is the skill with which male rites of passage are incorporated. The *double entendre* 'how stand'st thou' is part of a subtle dramatic mirroring that ties in with Edward's previous jests about his phallic prowess. Earlier still, Alexander resented being called 'boy' by one of the Electors: 'The time will come when I shall be made a man' (1.2.266). He dwells on the old German initiation ritual in which a boy is boxed on the ear and given a sword, thus promoting him to manhood.[66] When Alphonsus performs the custom for his page, a priapic aspect is firmly in the emperor's mind: 'Stand stiff, sir boy, now com'st thou to thy trial!' (2.2.58). Alexander's immediate concern, girded with the sword, is violent revenge – he fantasises about stabbing his enemies (2.2.268, 303). But the emperor, secretly planning the bed-trick, is more concerned with *sexual* rites of passage. An irony is felt in Edward's bewildered response to the ear-boxing custom, which he considers a humiliation (2.2.64-70): the English prince is intent on proving himself a man rather than a 'great boy' with his bride, yet he is to be thwarted by this seemingly *unmanly* page. Again, comedic questioning of an unfamiliar ritual foreshadows tragic anguish. Alexander, learning of the bed-trick, professes himself

[66] See Parrott edition, note to 1.2.261-5.

'no man' if does not achieve a simultaneous sexual and vengeful gratification (3.1.343). He calls on the relevant gods to fortify him in a phallic capacity: 'Sweet Venus and grim Ate I implore/ Stand both of you to me auspicious' (348-9).

The blend of love and revenge signalled by the two gods here suggests the generic configuration underway in English tragedy at this point. Alphonsus is the first to mention Venus, as if to persuade Alexander that the bed-trick is an act of love. Left to soliloquise, however, the emperor calls it 'rape' (354). As with previous stage machiavels, such as Kyd's Lorenzo and Marlowe's Barabas, he takes an eroticised pleasure in targeting lovers. The bed-trick adds a prurient aspect: 'I long to see this sport's conclusion' (126). Such delight in 'stealing joy', and in unpredictable outcomes ('What strange events will follow'), seems to anticipate Shakespeare's Iago. Alphonsus's vicarious satisfaction is apparent as he imagines what Alexander is 'a-doing', confident that he will 'do it thoroughly' (370, 372). The conjunction of consummation and rape is even closer than that in *Titus*. Again, the onstage action is an index to the offstage. Hedewick is engaged in what she believes is a loving consummation, but the act's secret violence is underlined as we witness a burst of onstage brutality. Isabella is (chastely) hiding one of the Electors in her closet, fearful of her husband's intentions. Again there is a hint of prototype bedroom farce, but it is effaced when Alphonsus breaks into his wife's chamber, drags her out by the hair and decries her as a whore, before ordering his soldiers to kill her supposed paramour. He accuses the pair of adultery and (with a poisoning plot also afoot) of murderous treachery. Like the villains in *Titus*, Alphonsus takes a pathological delight in ruining marriage – including, in this instance, his own.

As noted above, post-nuptial inversions and revelations become an important part of the 'tragic wedding' theatregram. In *Alphonsus*, we start to see what 'strange events' will derive from the bed-trick when it emerges that the bride and groom's wedding night stories do not tally. Edward insists that he spent a melancholy night alone and 'never touch'd her body in a bed' (4.1.123); Hedewick swears (in German) 'That hast thou done, or the devil take me' (124).[67] The 'devil', of course, has already done just this, leading (as the Prayer Book devil intends) to instant marital discord. In the subtle

[67] Both language and stage devices associate Alexander with the devil. See Parrott's note to 3.1.21.

paralleling of Alexander and Edward, it is now the latter who is publicly struck, but not as part of an initiation rite. Hedewick's father, Saxon, delivers the blow, asking accusingly, 'What, think'st thou her a whore?' (128) – a question that echoes through numerous wedding night tragedies. Saxon has Edward arrested, before allying himself with Alphonsus, as 'a scourge unto the English nation' (155). Like Alexander, he is driven instantly mad with thoughts of revenge – all part of Alphonsus's long-range strategy. The nuptial knot which, it had been hoped, would signify a new political accord, is severed at the point of tying. New factions are formed in the general confusion, with only the Bishop of Collen, a martial (perhaps proto-Protestant) man-of-God, seeing clearly that 'the sweet young Princess/ Foully beguil'd by night with cunning show/ Hath to some villain lost her maidenhead' (203-5).

The bed-trick design is only belatedly revealed, yet it is the central event of an incident-packed play. The sadistic fallout is apparent in the play's most sensational scene (Act 4.3) which has a visceral horror to equal anything in *Titus*. With bold disregard for unity of time, the playwright leaps forward nine or ten months. The hope in many epithalamia of the era is for the hymeneal union to bear fruit. Here, such a blessing becomes a terrible curse. Hedewick and her father enter the palace courtyard '*with the* Child'; Edward appears on the walls above with his jailor. Saxon threatens to kill the unchristened infant – described, ironically, as 'the image of his sire' (44) – and his dishonoured daughter, then to execute the English prince unless he admits paternity. Edward is torn: as any other man he would accede, but as 'a prince of so high blood' he is duty-bound, given the possible consequences of illegitimacy to the crown, to maintain that he 'never carnally did touch her body' (89, 111). Edward has been deprived of sexual transition rites, but here he passes a test of kingship – at a terrible cost. With both men standing on honour despite Hedewick's desperate pleas, the pressure builds until Saxon, insanely obdurate, '*dashes out the child's brains*', flings its corpse for Edward's next meal, then kills his daughter, invoking (as Titus did) Virginius as a model (64). The violence is gratuitous, but the scene is not without subtlety. Edward curses the villain who 'with so foul a blot divorc'd our love' and, as he departs, calls for divine retribution to fall on the unknown 'author of this wickedness' (81, 162); the latter phrase hangs in the air as Alexander arrives to tell of an impending battle. His response to the bodies – 'O piteous spectacle! Poor Princess Hedewick!/… What slave has murdered this guiltless child?' (170-2) – provokes

Saxon's wrath. Alexander backs down, but we are left to wonder what he would have done had he arrived minutes earlier and seen his own child slaughtered. Tragic timing, as on the nuptial night, is foregrounded. The sense of doubling and displacement is brought home, as prince and page substitute for each other at both the conception and death of a 'first fruits' child.

The finest of the nuptial tragedies that I consider locate matrimonial transition rites within fully conceived social and political playworlds. Saxon names Alexander 'villain' and 'rascal' for daring to 'call me slave unto my face', but the page later proclaims himself 'as good a man/ As thou' (4.3.173-8; 5.1.397) – 'thou' here is a provocation, rather than the deferential 'you'. Social-class prejudice and resentment is voiced throughout the play, feeding the revenge, including its nuptial dimension. (Alexander could, perhaps, be seen as something of forerunner to De Flores in *The Changeling*, as a sexual revolutionary in a labyrinthine castle.) The page's recollection of the bridal-chamber contains a large measure of pride over whose place he usurped:

> But, ah! The sweet remembrance of that night,
> That night, I mean, of sweetness and of stealth,
> When, for a Prince, a Princess did embrace me,
> Paying the first fruits of her marriage-bed (4.2.130-33)

> How slyly did I satisfy my lust,
> Commixing dulcet love with deadly hate,
> When Princess Hedewick lost her maidenhead,
> Sweetly embracing me for England's heir! (5.1.196-9)

The socio-sexual pathologies of Jacobean drama are prefigured here. Alexander even fantasises about marrying the princess: 'I have best right to her,/ And love her best and have deserv'd her best' (4.2.138-9). He soon dismisses this as folly, but the idea that he was Hedewick's rightful husband is raised at the denouement when, both conceited and regretful, he calls Saxon 'Father' before proclaiming:

> 'Twas I that made your Grace a grandfather.
> Prince Edward plough'd the ground, I sow'd the seed;
> Poor Hedewick bore the most unhappy fruit,
> Created in a most unlucky hour,

To a most violent and untimely death. 5.1.422-26

Alexander's initial response to the emperor's proposal, that it 'Tickles my senses in a double sense' (3.1.345) is maintained throughout, even after he learns he has been gulled. An awareness of the trick as an act of revenge goes hand-in-hand with a ghoulish romanticism: Alexander takes his role as surrogate bridegroom to heart. The bed-trick – always disconcerting, even in comedy – raises various questions. Just how sweet were the embraces between the princess and her rapist? Was the pleasure mutual? (Some held that female pleasure was necessary for conception to occur.) Are lovers really so interchangeable in the dark? Can 'deadly hate' truly pass for 'dulcet love'? The playwright conceives of the wedding night as the site of an intimate, sociopathic revenge, one that implicitly tests the marital agenda of the age, particularly with regard to its romantic and erotic promises.

If *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* is indeed a play of the early 1590s, it can be counted as a highly innovative work, and not just for the nuptial bed-trick. Fredson Bowers suggests that the splitting of revenge between a machiavel and what he calls a 'tool revenger' is a first,[68] one that introduces a compelling dynamic – though Alphonsus's hold over Alexander is never convincingly established. The play has various weaknesses: a criticism made of *Titus Andronicus*, that it lacks the ongoing business of a 'larger social world in which the outrage takes place',[69] could also be applied to *Alphonsus*, particularly in its laboured final movement, where the wider political situation is thinly drawn. Alphonsus's change of heart at the end is problematic too, given how he taunts Edward almost to the last:

O Prince of England, I do count thee wise,
That thou wilt not be cumber'd with a wife,
When thou hadst stol'n her dainty rose-corance,
And pluck'd the flow'r of her virginity. 5.1.121-4

Despite his cynical and misogynous view of marriage, a vestige of spousal love seems to play a part in the tyrant's implausible last-ditch confession, where he trades his own life (and soul) to save Isabella and Edward. 'Princely' English behaviour wins through over Spanish diabolism, and the play concludes with Richard crowned as

[68] Bowers 1940: 246.
[69] Barber and Wheeler 1986: 125.

emperor, an ‘English Caesar’ promising ‘all earthly joy’ (513-4). A stirring patriotic appeal is put forward by Martin Butler as a likely reason (in the context of the Thirty Years’ War) for the revived play’s popularity in the 1630s.[70]

Butler may well be right – the stalwart English code of honour ultimately triumphs. Yet I wonder if Caroline audiences responded more to the illicit thrills of the conflicted rites of passage plot, in which the lusty English hero loses out to an insidious anti-heroic avenger. The dominant matrimonial discourse is conventional, but the playwright touches on forbidden desires with energy, invention and insight. The central section of the tragedy – containing the revels and bed-trick – is one of the most finely realised dramatic episodes to have been staged by the mid-1590s. *Alphonsus* anticipates the transition-rite tragedies of Marston and of Beaumont and Fletcher in its choice of the bridal chamber as the point of convergence for clashing personal and political imperatives. There might also be an influence on the play I address in Chapter 3, Shakespeare’s *Othello,* in which a wedding night divorce is effected as part of a perverse revenge.

[70] Butler 1983: 337.

CHAPTER 3

Shakespeare's Wedding Night Tragedy

The main subject of this chapter is a consideration of *Othello* as a 'wedding night tragedy', one in which the bridal chamber becomes the locus of revenge. It depicts the idealism of newly married mixed-race lovers subverted by an insidious diabolic force – racist, misogynous and anti-matrimonial. As in *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, there is a 'stealing joy' imperative, with the newlyweds targeted specifically at the moment of consummation. Shakespeare is a major figure in the development of a 'tragic wedding' convention, taking up the nuptial torch from others before himself passing it on – his role given more prominence by the early deaths of Kyd, Marlowe, Greene and Peele. Much attention has been paid to courtship and marriage rituals in Shakespeare, with a significant focus on 'broken nuptials' and 'maimed rites'. As Carol Thomas Neely observes, 'Shakespeare appears to have been drawn to sources that contain broken nuptials; he multiplies instances of the motif, heightens its importance, and complicates its significance'.[1] This builds on Leo Salingar's insight that Shakespeare 'turned to Italian *novelle* for a particular type of plot', often adapting his sources to accentuate 'the motif of broken nuptials, the emotional conflict between love and law'.[2] Salingar's main concern is comedy, but the point applies equally to tragedy – the sources for both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* are adapted to focus on matrimonial rites of passage. Anne Barton suggests that Shakespeare has 'a near obsession with the status and solemnization of marriage', and an impulse 'to explore the psychological awkwardness and pain created by suspended, uncertain and vulnerable kinds of spousal agreement or marriage'.[3] The notion of a 'broken' or 'suspended' action is of major importance in 'tragic wedding' designs. As noted in Chapter 1, Greek romance was a model here, with its 'delayed consummation' frameworks, which allowed the sexual virtue (and identity) of sundered lovers to be repeatedly tested. Shakespeare utilises this pattern most clearly in *Cymbeline*, a play I consider in Chapter 5. My argument in this chapter is that Shakespeare adapts the

[1] Neely 1993: 26.
[2] Salingar 1974: 303, 315.
[3] Barton 1994: 27.

'delayed consummation' structure to a tragic end in *Othello*, creating an eroticised domestic tragedy of unnerving affective power.

A brief consideration of *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) will demonstrate Shakespeare's previous interest in 'tragic wedding' plots and motifs. His main source was Arthur Brooke's poem, *Romeus and Juliet*, which was itself adapted from a prose *novella*. One element of the plot dates back to Greek romance, namely the use of a sleeping potion to avoid an unwelcome marriage, but the comic strategy has a tragic outcome in the Renaissance tale. Shakespeare follows Brooke in presenting the transformation from 'wedding cheer to a sad burial feast' (4.5.87) when Juliet is found apparently dead. But the 'tragic wedding' motifs are far more extensive than anything in the poem. The marriage bed becomes a particular focus. Juliet's initial bride-of-death premonition is a rhetorical commonplace[4] – 'My grave is like to be my wedding-bed' (1.5.135) – but there is an increasing animation of this trope as the action progresses. Death becomes amorous when Juliet's erotic fantasies of 'love-performing night' are interrupted with news of Romeo's banishment: 'I'll to my wedding-bed/ And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead!' (3.2.5, 135-6). Her mock-death leads her father to consider her 'deflowered' by Death (4.5.37); the dramatic irony is reinforced when Paris, attending her tomb, ritually denotes her a *virginal* bride-of-death: 'Sweet flower, with flowers thy bridal bed I strew' (5.3.12).[5] Romeo must 'descend into this bed of death' (28) for an eroticised *liebestod*. Such features help to establish the 'tragic wedding' as a vital part of the 'collective scenic memory'.[6]

Romeo and Juliet is, famously, a rites of passage drama. Death intrudes on the wedding day as, in one test of manhood, Romeo is provoked into a street-fight. Another test is signalled by the nurse when she visits Romeo after his banishment is decreed:

> O, he is even in my mistress' case,
> Just in her case. O woeful sympathy!
> Piteous predicament! Even so lies she,

[4] Eg. 'When in my bridall-bed I finde a grave' Dekker, *The Wonder of a Kingdom* 2.3.40; 'my hopefull nuptiall bed, turnd to a grave' Daniel, *Hymen's Triumph* 1.1.53. Such images appear with far greater regularity after *Romeo and Juliet*.
[5] See Gittings 1984: 69, 117-18 on virgin burial; cf. the funeral rites for Ophelia in *Hamlet*.
[6] Dillon 2013: 209.

Blubb'ring and weeping, weeping and blubb'ring.
Stand up, stand up, stand, and you be a man,
For Juliet's sake, for her sake, rise and stand;
Why should you fall into so deep an O? 3.3.84-90

One thing to note here is the generic function of the nurse, rooted in the comic theatregram of *la balia* as a go-between.[7] Almost everything she says is a *double entendre*. 'Case' (vagina) and 'stand' (erection) were common slang terms. The tragic 'O' is pitted against the anatomical 'O' of sexual pleasure – Romeo must choose the latter if he is to make the transition into manhood. One of the lovers is onstage, the other offstage, but they are metonymically fused by means of the nurse's unwitting bawdy. Romeo rises at Juliet's name and goes, as Friar Lawrence puts it, to 'Ascend her chamber' (3.3.147) – the marriage must be consummated to be made sure. The newlyweds appear to experience a night of pleasure, judging by their famous aubade, meaning that Juliet does not die as a bride 'maiden-widowed' (3.2.135); the lovers are robbed of a companionate life together, but no rival first robs them, as in *Alphonsus*, of nuptial fulfilment, of what Romeo anticipates as 'a joy past joy' (3.3.173). A transition into adulthood is thus effected, even though the marriage is death-marked. It brings, as Frank Kermode observes, 'a kind of adult fatalism' on the part of Romeo, and the striking transformation of Juliet 'into a mature and suffering woman'.[8]

Romeo and Juliet is rather different in this to a number of 'tragic wedding' plays that were to follow, where lovers, disturbed in their nuptial rites, do not emerge from the liminal phase, and find no consummation other than in death. The play that is crucial in establishing this model is *Othello* (c.1602-03), which is structured around a deferred consummation. Shakespeare had included significant erotic postponements due to 'broken nuptials' in a number of plays, such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Shakespeare 'greatly extended the moment when a couple was "wedded, not yet bedded"',[9] but created, in Helena, an arch-manipulator who ensures that the consummation finally takes place. In *Othello*, the tragedy nearest in date to *All's*

[7] See Clubb 1989: Prologue.
[8] Kermode 1974: 1057.
[9] Jacobs 2001: 125.

Well,[10] an arch-manipulator endeavours, in my view, to ensure the exact opposite. The 'delayed consummation' of the comedy derives from its source,[11] but Shakespeare introduces this structure in *Othello* in order to create a 'wedding night tragedy'. For Michael Bristol, the play revolves around a diabolic rite in which Iago stands as a figure of 'carnivalesque disturbance or charivari… whose task is the unmaking of a transgressive marriage'.[12] Bristol suggests that the tragedy works as an inverted, emptied-out romantic comedy.[13] Instead of moving towards marriage, towards an offstage 'Lovers, to bed' consummation, *Othello* ends with an onstage murder on the wedding sheets, an act that almost all modern commentators see as a grotesque parody of a sexual union. Revenge here results in a love tragedy of unprecedented intimacy, one in which 'the marriage bed is at the very heart'.[14] It should be noted that Iago does not set out, like Alphonsus, with a specific plan in mind – his targeting of the wedding night is more improvisatory. As the stakes are murderously raised, however, preventing a sexual union becomes an increasingly perverse imperative.

Before turning to the play itself, I would like to address the critical dispute about the consummation in *Othello*. Stanley Cavell proposes that we think 'not merely generally of marriage but specifically of the wedding night' with regard to *Othello*, yet Brain Vickers derides the notion that the wedding night is of any particular importance to the tragedy.[15] Vickers also asserts that 'we are left in no doubt' that Othello and Desdemona consummate their marriage on the first night in Cyprus. This is the traditional view – Harley Granville-Barker describes the matter as 'plain', whilst Laurence Lerner likens the pair to Romeo and Juliet in that they sleep together once.[16] There is nothing in their behaviour the next morning, according to Arthur Kirsch, to suggest that the sexual union was anything other than pleasurable.[17] Yet the placing of the consummation just prior to Othello's sudden psychological fall has led many commentators to question straightforward assumptions about the wedding night. According to Edward Pechter, Shakespeare invites us 'to locate the origins of

[10] *All's Well* is usually dated 1602. *Othello* is traditionally given as 1604, but I agree with Honigmann (Arden) and Neill (Oxford) who suggest 1602 or 1602-03 respectively in their editions.
[11] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.9.
[12] Bristol 1992: 75.
[13] Various critics point out the play's generic links to comedy, eg. Snyder 1979 and Orgel 2003.
[14] Neely 1993: 105.
[15] Cavell 1987: 131. Vickers 1993: 475-6n43.
[16] Granville-Barker 1945: 30; Lerner 1979: 53.
[17] Kirsch 1981: 23.

Othello's transformation in his sexual consummation'.[18] Numerous theories have been forwarded as to what destabilises Othello at this point, with some pointing to excessive sexual pleasure (either his own or Desdemona's) and others to sexual aversion or disgust.[19] Such readings suggest that carnal realities bring out repressed drives or fears in Othello's romantically idealizing nature: the supremely self-controlled general undergoes a loss or dispersion of identity in the sexual act which leaves him vulnerable to Iago's insinuations, perhaps only too ready to believe them. The most influential discussion of the wedding night is probably Cavell's, whose 'guiding hypothesis about the structure of the play is that the thing *denied our sight* throughout the opening scene… is what we are shown in the final scene, the scene of murder'; the 'thing' here is the consummation, about which Cavell speculates at length, considering various possible scenarios before suggesting that Desdemona's aroused 'flesh and blood' carnality might have rendered Othello 'impotent and murderous', leading to 'a final, fatal re-enactment of their wedding night' in the bedchamber.[20]

All of these readings depend either on an assumption that the consummation has taken place, or that it is a failure due to Othello's fearful or confused sexuality. But do the lovers ever get to this point? In their article, 'Othello's Unconsummated Marriage', published in 1983, T. G. A. Nelson and Charles Haines argue that there is no time for the sexual union to occur – Iago prevents it on the first night in Cyprus, then prompts a sexually frustrated Othello to murder his wife on the next.[21] This reading has been strongly challenged both for its dependence on an unreliable time scheme, and for its

[18] Pechter 1999: 87.
[19] Kott 1967: 95 suggests that Othello sees Desdemona as a 'slut' for the pleasure she takes in sex; for Traub 1992: 39, Othello's romantic ideals are upset by a liberated Desdemona's 'distressing erotic mobility'; Hallstead 1968: 107 also sees Othello as unprepared for his wife's carnality, but he suggests that it awakens an idolatrous ('madly excessive') love for her. In an influential study, Greenblatt 1980: 250-1 argues that Othello is swayed by ascetic doctrines that turn 'pleasure' into 'pollution', and thus feels a 'dark, sexual revulsion' at the intensity of the consummation. (Wayne 1991: 167 critiques this reading for presenting 'a residual discourse as if it were the dominant one'.) For Novy 1984: 131, Othello 'feels guilty about the passion involved in his intercourse with Desdemona' and is unmanned by his loss of self-control. Psychoanalytical interpretations have seen Othello confronted on the wedding night by castration anxiety (Snow 1980), maternal abandonment (Adelman 1992), or repressed homosexual drives (Green 1992). Pechter 1996: 210 provocatively speculates that Othello is put off by Desdemona's 'nasty smell'.
[20] Cavell 1987: 132, 135, 136-7.
[21] The notion of an unconsummated marriage had been raised previously by critics such as Janton 1975, Pryse 1976 and Garber 1981: 135-9.

reductive conclusion that pent-up male desire is at the root of the tragedy.[22] Nelson and Haines' argument has proved influential, nevertheless, and has been supplemented by other critics, most notably Graham Bradshaw and Harold Bloom.[23] The latter considers the evidence unclear, but suggests that the point is 'crucial... for the entire tragedy turns upon it' given that Iago's insinuations 'would have no effect if Othello knew [Desdemona] to have been a virgin'.[24] The 'did they or didn't they?' debate is a minefield of surmise, assertion and refutation,[25] though a middle way has emerged, one that posits a deliberate indeterminacy on Shakespeare's part. According to Millicent Bell, 'a cloud of unknowableness' hangs over the consummation; Michael Neill argues similarly for 'a miasma of doubt', suggesting that 'the question of consummation remains fundamentally undecidable; and that surely is the point'.[26] This has become by far the most favoured critical position.[27] Those who argue for something more definite have been frowned on for spreading 'gossip concerning the physical consummation', or for 'treat[ing] the play as a detective story, or a realistic novel' and 'hunting for clues in the text'.[28]

A critical Catch-22 has arisen, with commentators condemned, on the one hand, for indulging in groundless speculation and, on the other, for supplying empirical evidence. Vickers wonders how much 'relevance such a non-represented, non-reported event could possibly have for the interpretation of a play'.[29] Neill also regrets 'the habit of prurient speculation' and 'naïve assumptions about the decidability of offstage actions', whilst acknowledging that the play 'works continuously to excite the scopic curiosity of the audience'.[30] A defence of such curiosity has been offered by Simon Palfrey who suggests that Shakespeare 'seeds our prurience', with the result

[22] See Neill 1989: 395-6; Adelman 1992: 271-2; Schalkwyk 2014: 203-5. Bradshaw 1993: 164, 181, also offers a critique, despite agreeing that the marriage is unconsummated.
[23] Bradshaw 1993: 163-90; Bloom 1998: 457-71. Others who read the marriage as unconsummated include Fineman 1991: 92; Hattaway 1994: 132; Greene 1995: 53; Tanner 2010: 518, 529-34.
[24] Bloom 1998: 460.
[25] As well as the abrasive attacks on Nelson and Haines, see Bradshaw 1993: 163ff on Greenblatt, and Vickers 1993: 308-20 on Cavell.
[26] Bell 2002: 108; Neill 2006: 136-7.
[27] See, for example, Boose 2004: 24-5; Hapgood 1990: 229; Little Jr 1993: 321; Everett 2000: 194; Schalkwyk 2014: 204-5; Palfrey 2005: 257; Pechter 1999: 86.
[28] Hapgood 1990: 228; Hall 1999: 34; Schalkwyk 2014: 204. Criticisms along these lines are also made by Pechter 1999: 18, 194n8 and Kirsch 1981: 23.
[29] Vickers 1993: 319.
[30] Neill 2006a: 136-7.

that 'speculative voyeurism takes the place of evidence'.[31] Palfrey argues that the 'supposedly prurient or illicit speculations enable the play's ethical punch', since 'not being told, and wanting very much to know, means that we dwell upon these things with whatever ethical or imaginative sympathy we can'.[32] I agree with Palfrey that Shakespeare intensifies the tragic impact along these lines, though I try in what follows to support my claims with evidence from the play and from other (largely dramatic) sources. What for Vickers is a 'non-represented, non-reported event' is addressed by a variety of means and is the subject of widespread speculation, innuendo and frank discussion *within* the play. I keep 'voyeuristic speculation' about offstage action to a minimum, except where it seems actively encouraged by Shakespeare's dramaturgy.

It is true that Shakespeare often deliberately complicates or blurs what could be straightforward – famously so with regard to Iago's motives. I noted the ambiguity about the Lavinia-Bassianus consummation in *Titus Andronicus* in Chapter 2, and I have some sympathy with the argument that what occurs offstage in the bridal chamber is 'fundamentally undecidable'. A post-structuralist stress on uncertainty seems particularly fitting with regard to 'wedding night tragedy' – after all, Derrida chose *hymen* as a trope of inbetweenness, simultaneously figuring love and murder, union and division.[33] There is a risk, though, in 'making too easy a virtue of indeterminacy',[34] especially if it stops us looking hard at the evidence, of which there is significantly more in *Othello* than in *Titus Andronicus*. I wish to address the non-consummation argument anew. Seasoned Othello campaigners might see this as akin to Ted Hughes's thistles 'fighting back over the same ground', but the topic has not been addressed in the context of a wider 'tragic wedding' convention. I hope to suggest the ways in which *Othello* is influenced by the emergent theatregram and is central to its further development, particularly with regard to structure, where I am in agreement with Cavell about the importance of 'the thing *denied our sight*' even though I disagree with his erotic conclusions. In my discussion of *Othello,* I trace multiple nuptial displacements before considering their wider implications. The tragedy is famous for its streamlined plot, yet it has a Janus-like aspect, with strands

[31] Palfrey 2005: 256.
[32] Palfrey 2005: 249, 257.
[33] Derrida 1991: 'The Double Session' esp. 185-6.
[34] Moisan 2002: 272.

of romance and revenge each requiring fulfilment – and each converging on the same moment of consummation.

'YET WE SEE NOTHING DONE': TRAGIC CONSUMMATION IN *OTHELLO*

The Common Prayer Book's 'Homily on Matrimony' told brides and grooms that the devil would 'labour to break this godly knot once begun between you'; succumbing to his temptations would 'weave the web of all miseries and sorrow'.[35] The diabolical aim is 'the breach of true concord in heart', turning 'pleasant and sweet love' to 'bitter and unpleasant discord'. This is 'the principle craft' of the devil and he 'taketh great delight therein'. Such targeting of a married couple is particularly clear in *Othello* when Iago summons the 'Divinity of hell' in his effort to untune the lovers' harmony, and to 'make the net/ That shall enmesh them all' (2.3.345, 356-7). One of Shakespeare's most striking adaptations of his Italian source, Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, is to make Othello and Desdemona newlyweds rather than a couple who have been married for some time (a period spent, we learn in Cinthio, in frequent lovemaking). In Shakespeare's condensed action, then, a 'demi-devil' (5.2.298) targets the lovers from the off – on their wedding night.

The elopement of Othello and Desdemona is another original feature, one that makes the consummation ('the thing *denied our sight*') such a pressing matter in the opening scene, firstly in the list of imperatives with which Iago spurs Roderigo into action as a rival suitor:

> Call up her father,
> Rouse him, make after him, poison his delight,
> Proclaim him in the streets, incense her kinsmen,
> And, 'though he in a fertile climate dwell,
> Plague him with flies! Though that his joy be joy
> Yet throw such changes [*F*. chances] of vexation on't
> As it may lose some colour. 1.1.66-72

[35] *Homily*: 447-8.

It is not clear which pronoun first refers to the as-yet-unnamed Othello, but 'his delight' and 'his joy' refer to nuptial pleasures. Othello has found a 'fertile climate', the paradisal garden of reformist marital doctrine. Iago hopes to disturb the consummation with 'poison' and 'plague', so that Othello's concupiscent pleasures 'may lose some colour'. As we saw with Alphonsus, a diabolic instinct tells the villain that this may do much. It becomes a driving purpose in the waking of Brabantio, where Iago conjures a bestial coupling, vigorous and shameless: 'Even now, now, very now, an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe!'; 'your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs' (1.1.87-8, 114-5). Iago's urgent intensifiers and repetitions give the impression that the frantic action is already underway, that they are too late, yet his other provocations – 'Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you'; 'you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse' (89, 109-10) – suggest that a swift response might just prevent an act of demonic miscegenation. There is indeed an indeterminacy at this point, a sense of the consummation as both happening now and yet to come. The scene ends with Brabantio calling for tapers and his kindred for a belated procession to the bridal chamber in an unmarrying rite. In an early instance of how 'the meaning of "O" is transformed during the course of the play… from fullness to emptiness',[36] Brabantio's distraught multiple 'O's sound an anti-epithalamic displacement of the lovers' cries.

We saw in Chapter 2 an increasing focus on the offstage bridal chamber. In *Othello,* Iago meets his captain outside the Sagittary, the inn at which the newlyweds intend to consummate their marriage. Might the players have hung up the sign of a centaur (Sagittarius) to reinforce Iago's sense of a bestial coupling? Iago tries to ascertain the success of his disruption, delicately enquiring 'But I pray, sir,/ Are you fast married?' (1.2.10-11). 'Fast' is rightly glossed by editors as 'firmly', but might hint at speed too – has the seemingly unflustered Othello gone quickly about his lusty business? An unconsummated marriage could be annulled: 'He will divorce you' (14), says Iago of Brabantio, feigning concern.[37] Othello remains non-committal, but nevertheless gives his ensign a remarkable insight:

> For know, Iago,
> But that I love the gentle Desdemona

[36] Vitkis 2002: 360.
[37] See Barton 1994: 22 on divorce laws.

I would not my unhoused free condition
Put into circumscription and confine
For the sea's worth. 1.2.24-7

A weight of private doubt over marriage lies behind this confidential admission. Othello has, since boyhood, only ever felt at home in the 'tented field' (1.3.86). Love has altered him, but his reservations seem barely overcome. Iago will later exploit this information to the full – this is a tragedy of, as A. D. Nuttall puts it, 'the hero who went into a house'[38] – but for now our attention is drawn to the indeterminate status of the marriage:

OTHELLO 'Tis well I am found by you:
I will but spend a word here in the house
And go with you. [*Exit.*]
CASSIO Ancient, what makes he here?
IAGO Faith, he tonight hath boarded a land carrack:
If it prove lawful prize, he's made for ever.
CASSIO I do not understand.
IAGO He's married.
CASSIO To whom?
IAGO Marry, to –
Enter OTHELLO.
Come, captain, will you go?
OTHELLO Ha' with you.

Picking up on Othello's valuation of Desdemona as above 'the sea's worth' (28), Iago presents his captain as a pirate, albeit one that might act with the state's sanction, plundering a treasure-laden ship. The past tense of 'he tonight hath boarded' again suggests that the consummation is already accomplished, yet with the broken off 'Marry, to –' Shakespeare hints at a crucially timed interruption.[39] Othello's return from a brief word with his bride – perhaps spoken in the bedchamber – sees him walk into ambiguity: 'To whom?' This fleeting piece of stage business points, subliminally, to the marriage-like murder vows that unite Othello and Iago at the close of the 'temptation scene'. The unanswered question creates an erotic frisson that extends

[38] Nuttall 1983: 134.
[39] The pun on the mild oath 'marry' ('by Mary') is common in early modern drama eg. 'Marry, that "marry"' Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* 1.3.63; 'Marry, will I, forsooth.' 'Will you marry, forsooth?' Marston, *The Dutch Courtesan* 2.2.120-1. The pun appears again in Act 3.1, as discussed below.

through the play, as we shall see. The other aspect to note here is Cassio's ignorance about the elopement, which might be genuine or feigned (we learn later of his role as the lovers' go-between). His appearance is on official duty, summoning Othello to a council of war on 'business of some heat' (40). Unlike Iago's, his is a legitimate intrusion upon that other 'business of some heat' we might expect the newlyweds to be about. Othello's gratitude towards his new lieutenant (''Tis well I am found by you') could not be further from his anger towards the hapless Cassio at the next nuptial disturbance.

The 'tragic wedding' theatregram is characterised by numerous tensions between public and private actions. Here, the personal matter of the consummation is uncomfortably exposed and politicised before the senate. Othello agrees to lead the Cyprus expedition with exemplary stoicism, implicitly acknowledging the comforts he must leave behind:

> The tyrant custom, most grave senators,
> Hath made the flinty and steel couch of war
> My thrice-driven bed of down. 1.3.230-2

'Thrice-driven' means the softest possible – a bed fit for royalty – though by the end of the play the nuptial bed proves the hardest place of all. (Is there a deep-lying pun here, with the lovers driven thrice from their comforts?) Othello requests that Desdemona be suitably accommodated in his absence, but she is unwilling to remain in Venice; like Iago, she understands the importance of being 'fast married':

> That I did love the Moor to live with him
> My downright violence and scorn of fortunes
> May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdued
> Even to the very quality [Q. utmost pleasure] of my lord:
>
> So that, dear lords if I be left behind,
> A moth of peace, and he go to war,
> The rites for which I love him are bereft me 1.3.249-52; 256-8.

The bride's frank, amorous avowal is striking, even in the toned down Folio version.[40] Othello is thrown by the sudden intermingling of love and duty, as his candid young

[40] Honigmann 1996: 16-19 suggests that the Folio 'protects' Desdemona, making her more modest.

wife 'emphatically draws together public and private domains'.[41] In seconding Desdemona, Othello is, for the first time, less than assured:

> Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not
> To please the palate of my appetite,
> Nor to comply with heat, the young affects
> In me defunct, and proper satisfaction,[42]
> But to be free and bounteous to her mind. 1.3.262-6

Othello claims to be no longer ruled by youthful passion, implying that he loves Desdemona in a mature fashion, not solely for her physical attractions. The phrase 'the young affects/ In me defunct' has an unfortunate ring, but does it mean, as some suppose, Othello's sexual indifference, repression, or even incapacity?[43] His later remarks on Desdemona's 'sweet body', her 'body and beauty', and how 'she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks', suggest that an appreciation of her sexual power is not lacking (3.3.349; 4.1.202, 181-2). Perhaps he plays down his virility in an attempt to counter racist assumptions about the 'lusty Moor'. His main purpose, however, is to reassure the senate that as a military leader he will not allow 'light-wings toys/ Of feathered Cupid' to 'corrupt and taint my business' (1.3.269-70, 272), which is in line with the common Renaissance discourse that linked male concupiscence with effeminacy. Othello would, it seems, agree with Francis Bacon that the wise 'sever [love] wholly from their serious affairs and actions of life' (358).[44]

A test of masculinity on the wedding day is another key feature of the 'tragic wedding' convention. I have previously noted that Theseus is called upon to take military action on his wedding day in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and we will see Massinissa face a similar test of honour in Marston's *Sophonisba.* Some kings or leaders fail the test, such as Heywood's merry Edward IV who puts his nuptial pleasure before the defence of the realm. He gets away with it, being bailed out by honest London citizens; Marlowe's Edward II and Gaveston, on the other hand, put

[41] Rose 1988: 138.
[42] Line 265 is felt to be corrupt by many editors. Nuttall 1983: 137-39 makes a case for the sense as deliberately tortured, to reflect Othello's discomfort. Cf. Castabella's request to accompany Charlemont to the wars in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, 1.2.95-8.
[43] See, for example, Hallstead 1968: 108-11, Garber 1981: 135-9, and Bloom 1998: 457-60.
[44] From Bacon's essay 'Of Love'. See Rose 1988: 93-96 for a discussion of this statement.

marriage revels ahead of tackling rebels, and pay the tragic price. A number of youthful characters are drawn into proving their manhood on the wedding day, either through fighting, like Romeo, or following a call to revenge, like Marston's Antonio. For the more mature Othello, the test is to maintain his martial prowess as a married man. We should not necessarily infer a reserved or squeamish lover from his politic, duty-first statements, though we might sense what Bell terms 'the uncertainty of the untried bridegroom, the too-readiness of the bride'.[45] Desdemona's dismay that Othello must depart immediately – 'Tonight, my lord?'[46] – is in marked contrast to his willingness to embrace duty 'With all my heart' (279):

> Come, Desdemona, I have but an hour
> Of love, of worldly matter and direction
> To spend with thee. We must obey the time. 1.3.299-301

None of this is lost on Iago. The couple are not yet 'fast married', nor will the hour before departure allow for a consummation. It is precisely Othello's acute discomfort over the mixing of 'love' and 'worldly matter', particularly on his wedding night, that Iago will target in Cyprus.

Shakespeare's decision to place the lovers in separate ships for the journey to Cyprus (another change from the source) is part of the 'delayed consummation' design. The storm (another change) not only disperses the Turkish fleet, but allows Desdemona to overtake Othello, a symbol perhaps of her rush to consummation and his comparative hesitancy. Cassio praises the treacherous elements as 'having sense of beauty' in allowing the 'divine Desdemona' safe passage – though his instinct that luck is on *Iago's* side ('He's had most favourable and happy speed') is closer to the tragic mark (2.1.67, 71-3). Cassio's ardent prayer for his captain also has a divine aspect:

> Great Jove, Othello guard,
> And swell his sail with thine own powerful breath
> That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,
> Make love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms,
> Give renewed fire to our extincted spirits
> And bring all Cyprus comfort! 2.1.77-82

[45] Bell 2002: 114-15.
[46] The majority of editors include this line, which only appears in Quarto; again, the Folio Desdemona is more restrained, or perhaps more alert to Othello's discomfort.

Jove is not only summoned as a protective but also a sexual force, sweeping Othello to an hierogamous union, a social blessing far from the degeneration envisaged by Brabantio. Cassio's view of a god-like conjugal love is the antithesis of the bestial hue given by Iago. Strong currents of idealism and cynicism with regard to marital sexuality existed in the era, as discussed in Chapter 1. Both are felt in the vicarious fascination with Othello and Desdemona's match that we find in Cassio's goodwill and Iago's malevolence. The latter is overtly racist, but Cassio draws more subtly on notions of a sexual Other, an exotic figure of legendary phallic endowment, his 'tall ship' capable of blessing the bay.[47] When Desdemona appears, Cassio treats her as 'divine' indeed, exhorting the Cypriots to kneel to the senator's daughter. Yet his description of her as 'the riches of the ship' is a refined equivalent of Iago's 'land carrack' image; his blessing 'the grace of heaven,/ Before, behind thee, and on every hand/ Enwheel thee round!' (85-7) is intended as reverential but seems lubricious in its tactile imagination.[48] The boldness of Cassio plays, of course, into Iago's hands – 'I will gyve thee in thy own courtesies' (170) – and comes to prey on Othello's mind more swiftly than he can 'Make love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms'.

The exhilaration of coming through the storm informs Cassio's extravagance, as it does the ecstatic reunion of Othello and Desdemona. Marital rites are traditionally concerned with a bride's safe passage from father to husband, but the clandestine match imperils Desdemona, subjecting her to trial and tempest. Othello's rapturous relief on finding that she has, miraculously, arrived before him – 'If it were now to die/ 'Twere now to be most happy' (187-8) – amounts almost to a verbal consummation, with its insistent 'now' on either side of 'die'. The sense of *liebestod,* foreshadowing Othello's final desire 'to die upon a kiss', leads Janet Adelman to suggest that he 'willingly substitutes death for union'.[49] For Neely, he exhibits a 'preference for a perpetually unconsummated courtship'.[50] As noted above, I see Othello as desirous of his bride, though anticipation is mixed with trepidation. Age difference is a factor – 'yet that's not much', as Othello later reassures himself (3.1.270). More significant, for a man of enormous self-control, are doubts over his

[47] Cf. 'Yet my tall Pine, shall in the *Cyprian* straight/ Ride safe at Anchor, and unlade her fraight' (85-6), Carew, 'A Rapture'.
[48] Honigmann (Arden 3 notes) wonders if Shakespeare knew Donne's 'Elegy 19'.
[49] Adelman 1992: 72.
[50] Neely 1985: 112.

capacity to handle 'too much of joy' (2.1.195) on entering a realm of 'fruit', 'honey', 'fountain' and 'chrysolite' – marriage, for him, is Eden, Canaan and New Jerusalem. Desdemona envisages something more quotidian and sustainable: 'The heavens forbid/ But that our loves and comforts should increase/ Even as our days do grow' (191-3). Here, suggests Jean Hagstrum, is the reformist ideal that combines desire and mutuality in marriage: Desdemona 'offers *Liebesleben* or *Liebeskraft* for his *Liebestod*'.[51] Othello's 'Amen to that, sweet powers!' (193) suggests his willingness to be led by his young bride in this balmy faith. Yet the kiss that follows coincides ominously with the word 'discord', even as Othello looks to a future of unending companionate harmony. Iago punctures the romantic aria with a jarring aside: 'O, you are well tuned now: but I'll set down/ The pegs that make this music, as honest/ As I am' (198-200). His role as villain derives much of its rebarbative power in counterpoint to what G. Wilson Knight called the '*Othello* music'.[52] Iago's dissonant notes foreshadow the nuptial intrusion ahead.

It has been suggested that *Othello* – Act 2 in particular – is the most 'novelistic' of Shakespeare's works, [53] but I would emphasise the way in which aspects of *stagecraft* carry subtle psychological shifts. The tussle between passion and reason in Othello is signalled when his herald proclaims an evening of revelry and feasting to celebrate, first and foremost, the destruction of the Turkish fleet; in addition to this, the party will serve as '*the celebration of his nuptial*' (2.2.7, 9). Note the sense of proper order. Othello let his guard down when greeting Desdemona on his arrival in Cyprus, a matter acknowledged with some embarrassment: 'I dote/ In mine own comforts' (2.1.205-6). It was a breach of protocol, but the proclamation implies that Othello has re-established self-control: his private cause for celebration is second to the public cause. He makes it clear that Cyprus remains on a war footing by putting a time limit on the festivities 'from this present hour of five till the bell have told eleven' (2.2.9-10). His caution is apparent as he retires to bed early, placing Cassio in command of the watch: 'Let's teach ourselves that honourable stop,/ Not to outsport discretion' (2.3.2-3). The lines might concern conjugal bliss as well as soldierly carousal. As he

[51] Hagstrum 1992: 403. Watson 2002: 77 sees Desdemona's response as Lutheran marital doctrine.
[52] Knight 1949.
[53] See Everett 2000: 190 and Burke 2007: 154. The latter raises this idea whilst arguing for a more dramaturgical attentiveness.

promised the senate, Othello will temper his ardency to fit with military dictates. He implies that he will have no trouble resuming his post-nuptial duty:

> Michael, good night. Tomorrow with your earliest
> Let me have speech with you. Come, my dear love,
> The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue:
> That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you. 2.3.6-10

The tone here is measured but the couplet – with which Shakespeare confirms that the marriage remains unconsummated[54] – is not without passion. I touched on the fructifying biblical echoes above. The mercantile language of 'purchase' and 'profit' might be taken for business-like reserve, but could equally be heard as assured and seductive (*Romeo and Juliet* includes not dissimilar imagery).[55] As in *Alphonsus*, the ironies mount up in retrospect: it will not be Othello with whom Cassio looks to speak at his earliest, but, fatally, Desdemona.

Othello believes that he has separated love and duty enough to be able to enjoy his wedding night, surrounded, he assumes, by friends in Cyprus. But his withdrawal plays into Iago's hands, as the precise timing given by Shakespeare makes clear. Iago has a little over an hour until the curfew. His first strategy in bringing Cassio down is again to make the bridal chamber the subject of voyeuristic fascination:

> CASSIO Wecome, Iago, we must to the watch.
> IAGO Not this hour, lieutenant, 'tis not yet ten o' th' clock. Our general cast us thus early for the love of his Desdemona – whom let us not therefore blame; he hath not yet made wanton the night with her and she is sport for Jove.
> CASSIO She's a most exquisite lady.
> IAGO And I'll warrant her full of game.
> CASSIO Indeed she's a most fresh and delicate creature.
> IAGO What an eye she has! methinks it sounds a parley to provocation.
> CASSIO An inviting eye; and yet methinks right modest.
> IAGO And when she speaks is it not an alarum to love?
> CASSIO She is indeed perfection.
> IAGO Well: happiness to their sheets! 2.3.12-26

[54] Almost all commentators from Rymer onwards agree on this, though Baxter 2014 argues that the marriage is consummated in Venice. I find Baxter's evidence for this tenuous, despite sharing his view of a 'normative' sexual desire between bride and groom.
[55] Eg. Juliet's 'though I am sold,/ Not yet enjoy'd' 3.2.27-8.

Nuptial concupiscence is allowable, and Iago's 'amorous battle' metaphors can, for all their coarseness, be construed as standard epithalamic fare. Yet he implies that the 'provocation' and 'alarum' of Desdemona's eye and voice might stir any man, not just her husband. Cassio could be played as entirely respectful, playing a suave straight bat to Iago's insinuations, a scholar impervious to soldierly banter. But I agree with Honigmann that he 'comes halfway to Iago's view',[56] drawn, despite himself, into an erotic dreaminess, caught between a sense of Desdemona as 'modest' and 'inviting'. Iago was not merely cynical in stating earlier 'That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it' (2.1.284). This is not to say that Cassio has any adulterous intent, or is anything other than a well-wisher to the couple he helped to unite – but he might just indulge in a sensual reverie over 'divine Desdemona'. Iago turns the projected god-like union into one of Jove's sportive *adulterous* liaisons. In fuelling an amorous mood, Iago thinks ahead to Cassio's solicitation of Desdemona; more immediately, a shared homosocial fantasy might tempt the tipsy lieutenant to take another drink. If Othello can indulge himself ('whom let us not therefore blame'), why should his men not do so for another hour? Iago presents himself as a well-wisher too, particularly in the wistful personification of the sheets. His prurient pleasure is to delineate the act he seeks to prevent, though he does not yet anticipate the bride-bed as *death*-bed. Iago's first concern is with the eleven o'clock curfew bell, with transforming the signal for security into an 'alarum', one that will call Othello not *to* but *from* his love.[57]

A focus on the marriage bed is crucial to the 'tragic wedding' topos. Behind Iago's sinister 'happiness to their sheets' blessing lies the rumour he chooses to believe about Othello, 'that 'twixt my sheets/ He's done my office' (1.3.386-7). Iago is a seething compendium of cynicism and discontent. His numerous resentments – sexual, racial, professional, social, philosophical – are all genuine and all compelling. My focus on the wedding night brings erotic aspects to the fore, though these cannot be divided from his other hatreds and grievances. The revenge of Cinthio's ensign is spurred by thwarted desire for Desdemona, but Shakespeare makes Iago's designs upon her more enigmatic:

> Now I do love her too,
> Not out of absolute lust – though peradventure

[56] Editorial notes to 2.3.20 and 2.3.13-17 (Arden).
[57] Cf. the first nuptial interruption: 'Awake the snorting citizens with a bell' (1.1.89).

I stand accountant for as great a sin –
But partly led to diet my revenge,
For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leaped into my seat, the thought whereof
Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards…
And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am evened with him, wife for wife…
Or, failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgement cannot cure 2.1.289-300.

Iago elsewhere acknowledges Desdemona 'framed as fruitful as the free elements' (2.3.336-7), but Lust is not his ruling sin. That, in my view, is Envy, the unspecified 'great' (or Deadly) sin on which he will be judged, the sin Francis Bacon describes as 'the vilest affection, and the most depraved… the proper attribute of the devil'.[58] How could an aging Moor, 'defective' in 'manners and beauties' (2.1.227-8), have won Desdemona? Iago's first thought is to sleep with her, but, sensing the difficulty of this, he aims to inflict upon Othello the insane jealousy Iago himself has suffered. The veracity of this history is confirmed when Emilia recalls how the rumours about Othello 'turned [Iago's] wit the seamy side without' (4.2.148). We also learn that he no longer pays the conjugal debt. Emilia steals the handkerchief in an attempt to win back some spousal affection, and later bitterly attests:

'Tis not a year or two shows us a man.
They are all but stomachs, and we all but food:
They eat us hungerly, and when they are full
They belch us.[59] 3.4.104-7

Iago's blood is 'made dull with the act of sport' (2.1.225). It is not clear whether Iago and Emilia's marital problems predate or stem from the Othello rumour. Either way, Iago seems bent on revenge not only against Othello, but (like the Prayer Book devil) against marriage itself,[60] plaguing the companionate, culturally-sanctioned 'fertile climate'.

[58] Francis Bacon in 'Of Envy' 357. Honigmann glosses 'sin' at 2.1.291 as 'revenge' but this does not sit well with the following line. I think another of the Deadly sins is implied.
[59] See also Emilia's speech 4.5.85-102.
[60] Cf. Baxter 2014: 286 on Iago's 'alleging impediments… to all marriage'.

Iago's instinct about the wedding night as a specific point of vulnerability for Othello matches his instinct about the handkerchief: 'This may do something' (3.3.327). But does this mean that he ultimately *prevents* the consummation? The debate has tended to hinge on Act 2.3. The scene's accelerated stage time takes us from a little before ten in the evening to nearly dawn. Adelman warns against speculation based on 'exact time-keeping',[61] yet the first part of the scene is precise in this respect. That the soldiers' drinking songs must occur before eleven o'clock is clear from the earlier proclamation. Cassio is not so drunk that he entirely forgets himself, as corroborated by the more sober Montano: 'let's set the watch' (116). The provoking of Cassio, and his subsequent fight with Montano are rapid, and the 'dreadful bell' (171) rings out at what should have been the curfew. Othello and Desdemona have had a little over an hour in which to consummate their marriage. 'How long does it take?' asks David Schalkwyk.[62] Shakespeare is specific about the bed-trick in *All's Well*, which lasts an hour, from midnight to one – time enough for Helena to become pregnant.[63] Yet that hour was prescribed beforehand, whereas Desdemona and Othello have the night ahead of them. Do they go straight to bed after departing the stage? Later scenes suggest that some time will be spent unpinning the bride, some perhaps in prayer. Various commentators follow Thomas Rymer in judging that the fight breaks out when the newlyweds are 'no sooner warm in Bed together'.[64] That this is Iago's understanding is implied by his explanation of how the fight began, referring to Cassio and Montano as

> friends all, now, even now,
> In quarter and in terms like bride and groom
> Divesting them for bed; and then, but now,
> As if some planet had unwitted men,
> Swords out, and tilting one at other's breasts
> In opposition bloody. 2.3.175-180

'Was there ever a more unlikely, a more outrageous figure of speech?' asks R. N. Hallstead, who suggests that the audience are alerted to the recent consummation.[65]

[61] Adelman 1992: 272.
[62] Schalkwyk 2014: 204.
[63] The notion of an hour for tragic or erotic completion permeates early modern drama eg. 'She's done,/ And undone, in an hour', Shakespeare and Fletcher, *Two Noble* 4.1.124-5; 'We'll find an houre for all', Fletcher, *Mad Lover* 1.1.151; 'pass a pleasant hour', Kyd, *Spanish Tragedy* 2.4.5.
[64] Rymer 1974: 37.
[65] Hallstead 1968: 114.

But has there been time for it? In my view, Iago risks such an insensitive image in the belief that he has, once more, interrupted the lovers at a crucial point. His calculation is underlined by 'now, even now… but now', recalling the intrusive 'Even now, now, very now' of the opening scene. He probes wickedly at this sore point to further inflame Othello's anger towards Cassio. Genial epithalamic motifs are darkened as genuine violence displaces the metaphorical 'amorous battle': here, in embryonic form, is the final tragedy. Iago savours the proleptic tang, casting himself as a malign planetary force, one that will indeed bring about a 'huge eclipse' (5.2.98) centred on the marriage bed.

As Neill amply demonstrates in his 'Unproper Beds' essay, the play 'persistently goads its audience into speculation about what is happening behind the scenes'.[66] Has Othello been thwarted just as his wife began 'to unlace herself', like Prince Edward in *Alphonsus*? Might the 'opposition bloody' played out with phallic blades be a precise analogue to the bedchamber proceedings?[67] Could the penetration enacted *in view* displace 'the thing *denied our sight*'? Othello's curious phrase 'unlace your reputation' (190) might hint that the moment of divesture preys on his mind (to lose his bride at this point was for *Alphonsus*'s Edward a grief 'intolerable, not to be guess'd'). Iago's act of spoliation is not solely about sexually frustrating Othello, as Nelson and Haines imply.[68] Iago tests his captain's ability to compartmentalise love and duty – already a perceived point of weakness. The disturbance falls out far better than he could have foreseen, with the injury to Montano making things much worse for Cassio ('he you hurt is of great fame in Cyprus'); Desdemona is drawn from the bridal chamber into the martial sphere, appearing at the very moment of Cassio's discharge: 'Look if my gentle love be not raised up!/ I'll make thee an example' (3.1.46; 2.3.245-6). Othello is faced with a decision which exemplifies the love-versus-duty dilemma perfectly, as he addresses both Desdemona and Montano:

> All's well now, sweeting,
> Come away to bed. – Sir, for your hurts
> Myself will be your surgeon. Lead him off…
> Come Desdemona: 'tis the soldier's life

[66] Neill 1989: 396.
[67] Cf. the onstage-offstage parallels of the pit scene in *Titus*.
[68] Nelson and Haines 1983: 14.

To have their balmy slumbers waked with strife.[69] 2.3.248-54

Othello accompanies Desdemona back to their bedchamber, but would he remain there, having just given his word to tend Montano, the man of 'great fame' who has been 'hurt to danger' (193) by Othello's recently promoted lieutenant? Would the lovers be in any mood to (as the traditional reading goes) joyously consummate their marriage in such circumstances? Shakespeare confirms that duty comes first when Othello complains of a headache the next day, to which Desdemona responds: 'Faith, that's with watching' (3.3.289) – watching over Montano, that is. We do not know if he stays up all night doing so, though this might well be the ironic implication (it is expected of a bridegroom, after all). We do know that both Cassio and Iago are awake through the night, but only for the latter do 'Pleasure and action make the hours seem short' (2.3.374).

Iago's self-satisfied jest is an ironic take on the epithalmic trope that wishes a long night of 'pleasure and action' for the bride and groom. That the satisfaction here is all diabolic might well have been inferred by an audience steeped in nuptial lore and decorum. But these subtleties – the kind of readerly details that attract a 'novelistic' tag – might well be missed in performance. Shakespeare provides further *theatrical* guidance on how things stand, however, in the scene that follows, in which the disgraced Cassio hires musicians to bid 'Good morrow, general' (3.1.2), leading to an exchange with a servant-clown. The clown scene in *Othello* has had worse press than almost any in Shakespeare. It is often held as an artistic lapse, with critics suggesting that the clown is 'miserably lacking in entertainment value', that his 'feeble essays at bawdry and wordplay have nothing conceptual to adhere to', and that the scene is 'so trivial and irrelevant that it is almost invariably omitted in performances'.[70] Lawrence Ross is one of the few critics to defend the interlude as thematically significant in the wider struggle between harmony and discord, but even he describes it as of 'very modest intrinsic importance'.[71] But why would Shakespeare, in a play often felt to be his structural masterpiece, foist this excrescence on the audience? Nelson and Haines identify something of the scene's dramaturgical purpose, but to little avail – of all the

[69] It is unlikely that the newlyweds went straight to sleep; the couplet makes a broad sententious point.
[70] Jones 1971: 139; Snyder 1979: 80; Bell 2002: 92.
[71] Ross 1966: 127. See also Minear 2009.

evidence they furnish for the non-consummation argument, their discussion of the clown scene has attracted the least attention.[72]

The stage aubade convention can help us here. A number of plays show musicians either waking the bride on the wedding morning, or waking the married couple on the morning after with a 'good morrow' serenade. It is an opportunity to bring music and clowning to the stage, making sport out of rites and decorum, including disputes over the type or quality of music, or over the payment of the musicians, as in Act 5.3 of John Lyly's *Mother Bombie* (c.1589). A similar scene is found in Antony Munday's *John a Kent and John a Cumber* (c.1594), a 'broken nuptials' comedy which flirts with tragedy when two brides who face forced marriages vow to kill themselves and their unwanted bridegrooms if they cannot marry their trothplight loves. Musicians arrive to bid 'Good morrow bothe the Brydes' with a pleasing tune, but the grooms are sung 'a sower [sour] good morrowe' (574, 580), which leads to a comic altercation. Shakespeare includes a flyting scene in *Romeo and Juliet* when musicians arrive to wake Juliet for her marriage to Paris; their performance is called off when she is found seemingly dead, but the clown (Peter) requests them to play for him, which leads to a spat over decorum: ''tis no time to play now' (4.5.109). In the absence of a communal post-nuptial *reveille*, Romeo and Juliet were themselves serenaded by a lark, its sweet voice suddenly discordant in 'Hunting [Romeo] hence with hunts-up to the day' (3.3.34). As we saw in *Titus Andronicus* (in Chapter 2), the play on the title of the traditional aubade, 'The Hunt's Up', has ominous implications. Early modern audiences were not only well-versed in wedding customs, but also with the witty and ironic inversion of such rites on the stage.

Cassio's apologetic gesture backfires, prompting an apparently bad-tempered Othello to send out a servant-clown to pay the musicians *not* to play: 'the general so likes your music that he desires you, for love's sake, to make no more noise with it' (3.1.12-13). Othello is gracious in paying the musicians, but he pays them no *thanks*. With neither bride nor groom making an appearance, the implication is unmistakable: celebratory music is unwelcome and inappropriate. It might even sound like the mocking

[72] Nelson and Haines 1983: 5-7.

charivari that would greet an old man who had taken a young bride, especially if the music is felt to be less than harmonious:

CLOWN Why masters, have your instruments been in Naples, that they speak i'th'nose thus?

1 MUSICIAN How, sir? how?

CLOWN Are these, I pray you, wind instruments?

1 MUSICIAN Ay, marry are they, sir.

CLOWN O, thereby hangs a tail.

1 MUSICIAN Whereby hangs a tale, sir?

CLOWN Marry, sir, by many a wind instrument that I know. 3.1.3-11

The nasal sound of the wind instruments prompts a joke about syphilis, known as the Neapolitan disease, which affected the sinus. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the phrase 'speak i' th' nose' is used about bagpipes (4.1.49), seen there as an instrument that can provoke a phobic reaction. Nelson and Haines suggest that bagpipes would serve here as a comic prop 'ludicrously reminiscent of the male genital organs', suggestive of detumescence.[73] We do not know whether the consort included bagpipes, but clearly some sort of reedy or droning noise is implied.[74] This allows the clown to indulge in jests about flatulence that have been found lame or distasteful by the great majority of commentators. But the clown's wordplay amounts to more than that. We have already seen punning on the mild oath 'marry' (by Mary) at 1.2.53. Here, the musician's declarative 'Ay marry are they' (i.e. 'they certainly are') is wilfully misconstrued as a *question*,[75] one that hangs over the first half of the play: 'Are they married, think you?'; 'Are you fast married?'; 'is your general wived?' (1.1.165, 1.2.11, 2.1.60). The clown dangles a response 'O, thereby hangs a tail' which implies that the marriage is as yet in the balance: the 'tail' (penis) is hanging; the 'tale' remains to be told.[76] The clown appears at the moment a playhouse audience might require clarification. His jests and, no doubt, gestures signal the offstage disappointment. This is Shakespeare's solution to 'the thing *denied our sight*'.

It might be objected that the clown cannot possibly know of bedchamber secrets. The role stands, however, both inside and outside the drama, on a metatheatrical threshold.

[73] Nelson and Haines 1983: 5.
[74] See Ross 1966: 117, 125, and Long 1971:145, 149n9.
[75] Cf. *Two Gentlemen* 3.1.284: 'mistake the word' as a Clown routine.
[76] Tale/tail is a common bawdy pun in Shakespeare.

It was almost certainly taken by Robert Armin, which makes, as Peter Holland notes, for 'a certain visibility of the actor here over the character… the Clown is the way he is because he *is* Armin, the company's Clown'.[77] Even viewed in more naturalistic terms, the clown knows that Othello is far from basking in post-nuptial satisfaction. Holland suggests that Armin 'probably did not thank Shakespeare for the part', but it seems to me that he was entrusted with conveying vital information, whilst unquestionably providing entertainment. (His jests topped the list when one playgoer, Edward Pudsey, jotted down lines during or after a performance of *Othello*.)[78] The role is not as distinctive as *Hamlet*'s Gravedigger or *Macbeth*'s Porter, but we should not underestimate its impact or importance. Consider the clown's further quip: 'If you have any music that may not be heard, to't again. But, as they say, to hear music the general does not greatly care' (16). I suspect a joke about the female orgasm, which was often referred to in musical terms.[79] ('As they say' is a marker of innuendo).[80] Does this mean that Othello has no wish to hear his wife 'sing' in an erotic sense? I do not concur with those who see in him an outright sexual aversion, either deep-seated, or brought on during consummation. The latter has not occurred, and, for the former, why would Iago – who, as many critics observe, reads Othello supremely well – target the wedding night unless the bridegroom's joy indeed *be* joy? Nor does Othello have a 'dislike of music' itself,[81] as has been argued: Othello's later paean 'O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear!' intuits Desdemona's mellifluousness as an antidote to Iago's bestial vignettes (4.1.185-6). Yet the general is in no mood for music of any sort *at this point*. The lovers have been impeded by Iago's covert charivari, the dissonance of which Cassio's choice of musicians serves to amplify. What does the well-meant but irksome serenade intrude upon? We learn from Emilia that the newlyweds are picking over the night's shameful events, that Desdemona is pressing Othello to forgive Cassio. Love and duty intermingle in the bedchamber at dawn. The lovers remain bereft of their rites. Already, on their post-nuptial morning, the bride and groom are not quite so 'well tuned now' (2.1.198).

[77] Holland 1989: 127.
[78] See Arden 3, Appendix 4.
[79] See entries on 'music' and 'prick-song' in Williams 1994.
[80] Juliet's nurse uses 'as they say' as a euphemism – *Romeo and Juliet* 2.4.166-7.
[81] Comensoli 1998: 92. Comensoli 101 misreads line 4.1.185-6 as sarcastic.

In his radical reworking of Cinthio, Shakespeare's design is clear – or would have been so in the early modern playhouse. Othello and Desdemona do not make 'the beast with two backs' in Venice; they travel to Cyprus in separate ships; the second nuptial night is horribly untuned by Iago. There has been neither the 'joyous consummation' assumed by some, nor the 'contaminating consummation' identified by others.[82] The aubade in *Romeo and Juliet* provides strong circumstantial evidence of a consummation; the main function of the 'good morrow' in *Othello* is to convey the opposite idea. This is not to treat the play as a novel, but to consider dramaturgical strategies which could have been *read* by its first audiences.

The final three Acts depict the accelerating events of a single day, culminating in the third of what Lynda Boose calls 'the three successive bridal nights of the play's construction'.[83] Iago planned to wait 'some time' before raising suspicions about Cassio, but seizes upon the information that the latter 'came a-wooing' with Othello, 'and so many a time… Hath ta'en your part', to imply a *pre*-nuptial betrayal (1.3.394; 3.3.71-3, 94-101). Shakespeare introduces the back-story (another major change from Cinthio) to allow for this crucial development,[84] one conspicuously missed by Rymer in his infamous attack on the play's time-scheme. There is, of course, no time in Cyprus for a prolonged adulterous liaison, but Iago manipulates Othello into believing that Desdemona and Cassio have conspired to (in Ben Jonson's phrase) 'antedate you cuckold'.[85] Before long, Othello is engrossed with the 'Where, how, how oft, how long ago' of the pair's implied illicit history, imagining 'the act of shame/ A thousand times committed' (4.1.86; 5.2.209-10).

Iago makes his insinuations in full confidence that Othello has no hymeneutic evidence to the contrary. How much time have the lovers had together?[86] We know that Othello 'Took once a pliant hour' to court Desdemona in Venice (1.3.152), but otherwise he was accompanied by Cassio, or used the latter as a go-between. The

[82] Ide 1980: 56; Adelman 1992: 273.
[83] Boose 2004: 26. Ridley 1958: lxviii calculates that the time represented in Cyprus 'is some thirty-three hours'.
[84] See Berger Jr. 2004: 12ff. on how this 'previously unmentioned shadow plot now emerges and starts to haunt the play'.
[85] *Epicoene* 2.2.140. Cf. Dekker's *Match Me in London* 1.2.71 for the notion of being driven into 'Cuckolds Haven' *before* marriage ie. on the strength of an engagement..
[86] See Bradshaw 1993: 181-2 on the 'drastic compression' of Cinthio's romance and its tragic effects; Bradshaw also offers a detailed and broadly persuasive refutation of 'double time' theory, 148-68.

newlyweds had limited time at the Sagittary on the first wedding night, followed by an 'hour/ Of love' into which 'worldly matter' intruded. The same is true of the hour or so (between 10 and 11pm) on their second bridal. Iago, the play's time-keeper, touches on this sore point later:

IAGO Will you think so?
OTHELLO Think so, Iago?
IAGO What,
To kiss in private?
OTHELLO An unauthorized kiss!
IAGO Or to be naked with her friend in bed
An hour or more, not meaning any harm?
OTHELLO Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm?…
IAGO So they do nothing, 'tis a venial slip 4.1.3-9.

There is, as Barbara Everett notes, something 'horribly funny' about Iago's quasi-legal mock-defence of Desdemona and Cassio.[87] He inflames Othello with his devilish advocacy, his outlandish reasonableness. The notion of 'an hour or more' in which lovers 'do nothing' is not arbitrary. Do Othello's conjugal embraces amount even to this? Has *he* been 'naked in bed' with Desdemona, or did the alarum indeed sound just as the bride and groom 'divest[ed] themselves'? Would Cassio have been quite so dilatory, given the chance? Shakespeare makes of Iago an artist of envy, whether spraying crude graffiti or, as here, finessing an equivocal interior. He is the trustworthy voice of reason – 'So they do nothing' echoes his earlier 'yet we see nothing done' (3.3.435) in arguing for restraint – all the while planting images of Desdemona and Cassio doing *something*. The emphasis on 'nothing' is itself a subtle goading, a reminder of Othello's own nuptial zero.

In Shakespeare's deferred consummation design, the fixed point of narrative destination is the same for the lovers and the revenger. Crucially, Iago must ensure now that there is 'nothing done' in the marriage bed: the hymeneal blood of consummation would prove him a liar.[88] He did not start out with murderous intent, but the violence of Othello's reaction means that Iago's own life is at stake: 'Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore… or woe upon thy life!' (3.3.362-9). The

[87] Everett 2000: 194.
[88] Leggatt 2005: 140 makes a similar point.

material 'proof' is the handkerchief, the symbolic value of which has been the subject of much critical discussion and ingenuity.[89] Boose's suggestion that the handkerchief stands for a 'visually recognizable reduction of Othello and Desdemona's wedding sheets' has been particularly influential;[90] in this reading, the red strawberries (a motif not found in Cinthio) on a white background carry defloratory associations. Nelson and Haines point further to a passage by Leo Africanus (a likely source for Shakespeare) which details the use of napkins to display virginal blood in Moorish wedding-custom.[91] An association with virginity is strengthened when Othello tells Desdemona that the silk was 'dyed in mummy.../ Conserved of maiden's hearts' (3.4.74-5). Boose's semiotic assumptions have, however, recently been challenged by Ian Smith, who argues for a *black* handkerchief, one that functions primarily as a metonymic representation of Othello's race.[92] His case, which rests on the bituminous quality of 'mummy', is forceful, but not conclusive, since purportedly medicinal products identified as mummy seem to have been available in different colours, including white and red.[93] (Webster even refers to 'green mummy' (4.2.121) in *The Duchess of Malfi*.) There can be no certainty over the handkerchief's original appearance – another complication is that the dye could relate either to the background fabric or to the ornamental work – but a red-white combination remains, I believe, a distinct possibility.[94] The description of the handkerchief as '*spotted* with strawberries' might well resonate with Othello's later sanguinary threat 'Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be *spotted*' (3.3.438; 5.1.36, my italics). Shakespeare uses blood-stained props in other plays (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Cymbeline*) to carry hymeneal associations.[95] Throughout his career he made much (as did many writers of the era) of 'immaculate white and red', and of what can be 'masked under such colours'.[96]

[89] See Harris 2009: Chap. 6.
[90] Boose 1975: 363.
[91] Nelson and Haines 1983: 8-9.
[92] Smith 2013.
[93] See Prioreschi 1996: 355-6 and El Daly 2016: 96. Dannenfeldt 1985: 173-4 discusses a 'red tincture' of mumia produced by Paracelsian physicians. The artists' pigment that came to be known as 'brown mummy' could have the *reddish* hue of burnt umber.
[94] It should be noted that this colour scheme is not just a matter of critical imagination – it has a long history on stage and in pictorial representations of the play.
[95] See Balizet 2014: Chap. 1 on 'The Bleeding Bride'.
[96] *Love's Labour's Lost* 1.2.90-93.

Iago's refers to 'an hour in bed', and the same length of time is highlighted when Desdemona tends to Othello's 'headache' with her handkerchief: 'Let me but bind it hard, within this hour/ It will be well' (3.3.290-1). Is there an erotic glimmer here, a delicately proffered chance of consummation? Perhaps another 'pliant hour' would indeed make the marriage 'well'. With so much modern commentary finding Desdemona's sexual frankness or enthusiasm objectionable to Othello, we need reminders that a loving consummation is not the problem but the solution. Shakespeare's dramatic structure makes this absolutely clear, as we shall see. But any sense of a romantic denouement hovering here is, fatefully, brushed away, and the handkerchief passes into other hands. The playwright loads the later row over the handkerchief with *double entendres*, some unconscious, such as Desdemona's valuation of Cassio, 'You'll never meet a more sufficient man', and some conscious, such as Othello's 'salt and sullen rheum', suggestive of pent-up seminal fluid (3.4.51, 93).[97] With the marriage unconsummated, the groom's distraught 'Is't lost? Is't gone?' (3.4.80) becomes an enquiry after his bride's maidenhead. This begs a question: if Othello supposes himself pre-empted by Cassio, why does he command Iago to 'prove my love a whore' (3.3.363) when it is within his own compass to 'prove' her a virgin? Musing on this, Bloom suggests an inherent sexual aversion,[98] but there could be a more pragmatic reason, a double-bind, with a consummated marriage making *divorce* much harder should Iago's accusations prove true.

Many 'tragic wedding' plays see the distinction between virgin and whore blurred during the initiatory phase. Othello's aversion is not to sex, but to sharing 'a corner in the thing I love', and being bound to a 'cunning whore of Venice' (3.1.276, 4.2.90). The handkerchief's symbolic circulation sees it pass from virgin to wife to whore before returning to Othello's myopic view. The 'brothel scene' follows, which A. C. Bradley found even more shocking than the murder.[99] For the first time the bride and groom are alone together on stage, in a private domestic space (we edge closer to the bedroom). Again, Desdemona speaks in unwitting innuendo: 'What is your pleasure?' (a prostitute's practised compliance); 'What horrible fancy's this?' (shock at her

[97] 'Salt' has a sexual meaning at 2.1.233 and 3.3.40. Cf. the sexual 'rhewme' (271) in Nashe's 'The choise of valentines', and 'salt amorous rhumes' (29) in Carew's (?) 'A divine Love' (poem of doubtful attribution).
[98] Bloom 1998: 457, 460.
[99] Bradley 1905: 178.

husband-client's proposition) (25-6). Might Othello see the kneeling, pleading Desdemona as a 'rose-lipped' (64) fellatrix?[100] Perhaps that is to succumb too much to Iago's pornographic power of suggestion, yet his drive to turn Desdemona's 'virtue into pitch' (2.3.355) infects everything she says and does. Othello's mind runs on the hypocrisy of whores who 'kneel and pray' (4.2.23). Kay Stanton calls what ensues a 'verbal rape' and 'ejaculatory defilement'.[101] This is a displaced consummation, in which the legitimate erotic energies of the wedding night are diverted into a perverse alternative. The exchange ends with Othello's sardonic payment for a sexual act – one that has been metaphorically played out *onstage* – as he storms from the room: 'We have done our course, there's money for your pains' (95).

An often noted example of inverted rites in the play occurs when Iago's match-breaking role leads him into a murderous homosocial pact with Othello. His pledge of obedient service, 'I am you own forever' (3.3.482), as the pair kneel to the heavens, is widely viewed as a pseudo-marriage vow. As such, it requires its own consummation. Iago goads Othello on his ignorance of the 'secure couch' of marriage, drip-feeding images of 'unproper beds' in which wantons 'lie' and 'gripe' and 'bolster' (3.3.402, 423; 4.1.34, 68, 71). Othello initially envisaged taking revenge within three days, but Cassio's 'confession' – as construed by Iago – persuades him to act sooner:

OTHELLO Get me some poison, Iago, this night. I'll not expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again. This night, Iago.

IAGO Do it not with poison, strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated.

OTHELLO Good, good, the justice of it pleases; very good! 4.1.201-7

Iago appeals to a sense of poetic justice in directing Othello to murder Desdemona in bed. It is a high-risk strategy – as noted above, a consummation now would discredit Iago – but he calculates that Othello will be motivated by revulsion rather than desire, despite his wife's 'body and beauty'. The timing is once more significant. Iago promises that Othello will 'hear more by midnight' (209) with regards to the murder of Cassio. Thus he steers Othello, with improvisational mastery, to a rendezvous with Desdemona at the traditional time for a nuptial consummation – which also doubles as

[100] Cf. the suggestive kneeling in Act 4.1 of Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*.
[101] Stanton 2000: 96.

the traditional time for a tragic catastrophe.[102] As in *Alphonsus*, two revengers join forces, one duping the other, directing him to prove his manhood in the nuptial chamber. Iago unmakes and refashions Othello, unmanning him even as he prompts him to 'be a man' (4.1.65). The murder scenario stems from Iago's fantasy to be 'evened with [Othello], wife for wife'. His 'sport' (1.3.370) takes on an ever darker hue, evolving at fibre-optic speed as he seeks satisfaction in macabre pornography. The pseudo-marriage stirs Iago's jaundiced eroticism. He will do Othello's office, possessing Desdemona vicariously, whilst the bridegroom proves 'nothing of a man' (4.1.90).

The nuptial framework is further clarified when Desdemona, at her most abject after the brothel scene, requests: 'Prithee, tonight/ Lay on my bed my wedding sheets' (4.2.106-7). She hopes to win back Othello's affection not, as some have assumed, with a reminder of their happy consummation,[103] but rather by proving herself a loving and honest bride in a third bid to seal the marriage. Consider this seldom discussed passage from the willow scene:

OTHELLO O, Desdemona –
DESDEMONA My lord?
OTHELLO Get you to bed
On th'instant, I will be returned forthwith.
Dismiss your attendant there: look't be done.
EMILIA How goes it now? He looks gentler than he did.
DESDEMONA He says he will return incontinent
And hath commanded me to go to bed
And bid me dismiss you.
EMILIA Dismiss me?
DESDEMONA It was his bidding; therefore, good Emilia,
Give me my nightly wearing, and adieu,
We must not now displease him. 4.3.5-15

The audience knows, of course, why Othello wants Desdemona in bed and Emilia out of the way. He has reined in his temper, but Desdemona senses his urgency. Most editors gloss 'incontinent' simply as 'at once', a synonym for Othello's 'forthwith',

[102] Cf. *Midsummer* 5.3.363 and *All's Well* 4.2.54; see also Dekker *Satiromastix* 1.1.37. The soul of Marlowe's Faustus is claimed by the Devil between twelve and one o'clock.
[103] See, for example, Granville-Barker 1945: 69 and Pechter 1999: 126.

yet Shakespeare never uses the word 'incontinent' without some sense of unrestrained passion, usually sexual. Those editors who acknowledge such an implication suggest that it would be odd or unintentional coming from Desdemona.[104] Why? Whilst the word is not used in a bawdy vein, she understands Othello to mean that it is time for their postponed consummation. 'We must not now displease him' signals obedience in general, but has a sexual register too. It is important to bear this in mind when considering the unnerving intimation that follows:

EMILIA I have laid those sheets you bade me on the bed.
DESDEMONA All's one. Good faith, how foolish are our minds!
If I do die before thee, prithee shroud me
In one of these same sheets.[105]
EMILIA Come, come, you talk. 4.3.20-23

'All's one' – no matter. A terrible fatalism settles on the scene, despite attempts to brush anxieties away. Desdemona's premonition that the bridal bed will prove her death bed is less overt than Juliet's, but more haunting given that she fears her own husband. Do her continued preparations signify a masochistic compulsion on her part, as some, such as René Girard, have argued?[106] Such readings seem deaf to the melancholy undertow (provided, not least, by the willow song). There is no willingness on the part of the bride to 'die' in anything other than a sexual sense. Not that Desdemona anticipates a mutually satisfying union now – she simply hopes to prove her virginal innocence, thus allaying the malign influence over her husband. The tragedy is that this is tantamount to 'unconscious collusion with Iago'.[107]

The nuptial union underpins the play from first to last, and everything dovetails in the final scene. Approaching the sleeping Desdemona, Othello is faced with alternative consummations, loving or fatal. His psychomachia, a choice between 'better angel' and 'demi-devil' (5.2.206, 298), is reinforced by the twin narratological imperatives of revenge and romance. On her wedding/winding sheets, Desdemona appears to Othello's double-vision as both whore and virgin. He enters the chamber as a sexual avenger, but finds himself a bridegroom, taking in his lover's beauty in intoxicated

[104] See Honigmann and Neill editions.
[105] See Gittings 193-4 on the tradition of using wedding-sheets for funerary purposes.
[106] Girard 2004: 293: 'the tragic outcome fulfils her most secret expectation'; Reynolds 2003: 74 claims that she dies as a willing participant in 'a masochistic scenario gone awry'.
[107] Neill 2006a: 173.

fashion, though he casts a marmoreal pall over her vitality, turning the bed into a tomb:

> It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood
> Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow
> And smooth as monumental alabaster 5.2.2-5.

Othello's change of mind over how to kill Desdemona might in itself suggest that she remains a virgin: he would preserve her purity, even if he considers it an illusion. Humoral theory held female sensuality 'cold' until warmed by masculine heat (a point reinforced later in Othello's remorseful 'Cold, cold, my girl,/ Even like thy chastity') (5.2.278-9). A traditional metaphor for taking virginity – 'when I have plucked the rose' (13) – serves here for taking a life. Her virginal appearance protects her as she sleeps, but she wakes to be tried as a whore. Iago has effected a kind of bed-trick, substituting one Desdemona for another.[108] It leads to a highly physical struggle on the bed, which Graham Bradshaw calls 'this marriage's only consummation, and the ghastly tragicomic parody of an erotic *death*'.[109] It is a grim irony of the play that Othello's wife, killed for being a whore, dies a virgin.

We saw in Chapter 2 how in *Titus Andronicus* an offstage act of rape is deictically superimposed on a recent nuptial consummation. In *Othello,* another superimposition occurs, this time onstage and simultaneously, as the murder of Desdemona perversely fulfils Iago's thanatotic desires. Playwrights, as we have seen, were developing an acute sense of tragic timing. This goes for exits and entrances too, where the dramaturgical time-keeping is once again acute in *Othello*. On each of the play's three nuptial nights, Shakespeare gives us a street scene via which we can chart the tragic intensification. We move from the threat of violence before the Sagittary, to the brawl which leaves Montano wounded, to the attempt on Cassio's life and the murder of Roderigo. On the first two occasions, the action intrudes upon the bride and groom just as they are about to consummate their marriage. On the third night the street scene is followed – in script terms, though the action overlaps – by an interior scene in the bridal chamber. Again, there is an interruption, but this time the disturbance

[108] Neill 1984: 130 describes Iago's substitution of himself for Desdemona in Cassio's 'dream' as a 'black-comic version of the bed-trick'; Vaughan 2005: 96 finds suggestions of the bed-trick convention in the play.
[109] Bradshaw 1993: 167.

(news of the attack) arrives momentarily too late to prevent the crucial act, the deadly consummation. Time drains rapidly, as Desdemona pleads for 'tonight… but half an hour… one prayer' (79-81). Desdemona's stifled cries of 'O Lord!' meld with Emilia's calls for 'My lord!' (87-8).[110] This is the darkest bedroom farce imaginable: the tragic 'O's that reverberate through Act 5 burlesque the 'O's of erotic pleasure;[111] the lovers' 'pliant hour' has been supplanted: 'O, heavy hour!' (97).

Henry Jackson's record of a 1610 performance of *Othello* attests to the haunting affective power of Desdemona's role in the final scene:

> But truly the celebrated Desdemona, slain in our presence by her husband, although she pleaded her case very effectively throughout, yet moved (us) more after she was dead, when, lying on her bed, she entreated the pity of the spectators by her very countenance.[112]

Jackson's praise of Desdemona's self-defence is noteworthy, given that a 'perverse interpretive tradition' insists on her as a passive figure.[113] Her courage is seen when she defends herself both verbally and physically on the tester-bed, taking Othello aback: 'Nay, if you strive' (80). The acquiescent bridal martyr was to become a significant type on the Renaissance stage, exhibiting Griselda-like patience or Alcestis-like selflessness, but Desdemona's spirited resistance is of a different order. That said, Jackson's testimony highlights the emotive impact of her prone body after death, after, that is, her momentary resurrection, where she again defends herself – 'A guiltless death I die' (121) – before selflessly covering for Othello. The non-consummation reading is significant here, since a number of commentators have found this moment akin to a Marian intercession.[114] As a bountiful wife, Desdemona fulfils humanist or Protestant marital ideology; she dies in a self-determined bid to lose her virginity. In death, however, she becomes a virginal icon, a 'heavenly sight'

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[110] Desdemona's 'O Lord' cries appear in Q1, but not in the Folio. Dyce, quoted in Ridley's Arden 2 notes, disapproves of them as 'not a little comic' and 'disquietingly vulgar'; Ridley defends it as poignant, the female voices making a 'macabre duet'. For Boose 2004: 22, the death-throes are 'suggestive paroxysms'.

[111] There are nearly fifty 'O's in this scene, which follows twenty-five or so in the previous scene. Cf. Pandarus's erotic-death song of 'O' in *Troilus and Cressida* 3.1.115-126.

[112] Quoted in Pechter 1999: 11.

[113] Pechter 1999: 131.

[114] See Watson 2002: 66-8, Maillet 2007 and Espinosa 2011: 111-119. The latter considers the consummation an indeterminate matter, but suggests that the idea of Desdemona's perpetual virginity opens up an intercessionary reading.

(271), 'entreat[ing] the pity of the spectators by her very countenance'. Othello compares her to a cast away 'pearl' (345), a jewel long associated with virginity;[115] drawing attention to her pallid beauty, he declares 'When we chall meet at compt/ This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven' (271-2). His murdered bride will, he believes, see him damned on the Day of Judgement. Yet the stagecraft accentuates her angelic presence, implying, perhaps, an alternative eschatological rite, in which Desdemona – who even extends mercy to the play's 'eternal villain' (4.2.132) – serves as a spiritual mediator on her husband's behalf.

This is not to absolve Othello of his crime, or to suggest that the final displaced consummation – 'to die upon a kiss' (357) – readily offers a redemptive union. The denouement is, after all, a welter of rage, madness, fear and guilt. I noted in Chapter 1 how the marriage-as-sacrifice trope in Euripides and Seneca was fuelled by anger over political and religious expediency. Shakespeare's delineation of the masculine antipathies and honour codes that bring Desdemona to the bed-altar-tomb as a bridal 'sacrifice' (65) is similarly impassioned. The anger is best expressed in the brave defiance of Emilia and Bianca in Act 5, particularly that of Emilia in the bedchamber. The final scene has three movements, each culminating with a death, another corpse on the conjugal bed – though Emilia is often denied a place there in productions keen to heighten the *liebestod*, or abstract the leads from the ensemble. That three bodies should lodge together is apt for a tale rooted in jealousy and suspicion, especially given Emilia's role in exposing Iago (she is his blind spot). Her 'willow scene' fantasy, 'Yet we have some revenge' (4.1.92), is fulfilled in unexpected fashion in the bridal chamber. Renaissance drama has few more powerful moments than Emilia's realisation of her own complicity, and her denunciation – particularly strident in the Folio – of both Othello and Iago, which wells up out of compassion for Desdemona: 'O mistress, villainy hath made mocks with love' (147). Great romantic drama always gives us 'more than a universe of two'.[116] Only through Emilia, singing a scrap of the willow song, does Desdemona 'die in music' on the bed (245).

Shakespeare's 'wedding night tragedy' is concerned with rites of passage for both sexes. Desdemona dies in a liminal threshold-state, both virgin and wife, in the 'heavy

[115] See Luttrell 1962. Cf. the Armada portrait of Elizabeth I.
[116] Bradbrook 1976: 167.

interim', still 'bereft' of her rites (1.3.258-9). With regard to Othello's transition rites, the use of weapons is of interest on his three nuptial nights. Othello is called upon to draw his sword on each occasion. He proves himself as a soldier rather than lover on the first two, facing down Brabantio's arrest party, and quelling the fight between Cassio and Montano. On the third night he comes to Desdemona as judge and priest, wielding the 'sword' of 'justice' (5.2.17), making a sacrificial altar of the bed. As it is, Othello strangles his wife with his bare hands, but he goes on to make use of assorted weapons, threatening Emilia and Gratiano, and making two attempts on Iago's life, only to be humiliatingly disarmed: 'every puny whipster gets my sword' (242). Swords in *Othello* are less overtly phallic than in, say, *Romeo and Juliet* or *Antony and Cleopatra* – until, that is, Othello boasts 'Behold I have a weapon:/ A better never did itself sustain/ Upon a soldier's thigh' (5.2.257-9).[117] The braggadocio immediately leads to an anguished self-recognition: 'O vain boast!' (262). There is suggestiveness in Othello's progression as a warrior-bridegroom: he displays masculine prowess on the first wedding night, remains potent, if shaken, on the second, but is utterly unmanned on the third. Iago is the one to use his 'sword upon a woman' (222) in the bedchamber. Othello does experience a recovery, however, mysteriously producing the last of three weapons with which to enact a revenge on himself. The link between weapons and sexual potency is a key element of the 'tragic wedding' theatregram, as we shall see; it is often at its most effective when felt, as in *Othello*, as a subtle phenomenological undercurrent.

I have noted in previous chapters that the deferral structures of romance narratives allow for a proliferation of sexual personae, particularly at the point of entry to marriage. One of the unique aspects of *Othello* is how this process takes place at a psychological level. Cyprus promised a divine matrimonial union, but the newlyweds are reduced, figuratively, to 'procreants' in a brothel, to a soldier visiting a camp-follower available to 'pioneers and all' (4.2.28; 3.3.349). Iago inflames Othello's imagination with the graphic bisexual erotics of Cassio's dream, and the thought of 'civil monster[s]' lying by their 'millions' in 'unproper beds' (3.3.416-28; 4.1.67-8). Most of the lubricious multiplication occurs in Othello's mind, though Iago is a supplier of pornography – 'uncleanly apprehensions' (3.3.142) – to Brabantio,

[117] See Fiedler 1972: 194; Teague 1991: 181.

Roderigo and Cassio as well. He names the animals for them and they catch the mood, adding to the sexual bestiary: Barbary horses, guinea-hens, baboons, wolves, goats, monkeys, fitchews. The generative 'fountain' of Othello's marriage is reduced to a dry cistern where 'foul toads knot and gender', or to the loathsome fertility of 'summer flies… in the shambles, that quicken even with blowing' (4.2.60-3, 67-8). Iago has indeed plagued the 'fertile climate' with flies, besmirching the highest of Renaissance matrimonial ideals, setting off a chain of sordid erotic displacements which come to a head in the bridal chamber.

Staging the bedchamber scene has often been a fraught and controversial business, though from the start its affective impact has been recognised, as we see from Henry Jackson's record. His phrase noting that Desdemona is killed 'in our presence' is a telling one. Few English dramatists of the time were ruled by neoclassical propriety when it came to presenting violence, and many deaths were shown onstage. But would Jackson have applied this phrase to any prior instance? Shakespeare takes a major mimetic step, as we see from the numerous bedroom scenes that follow, including bridal-chamber murders in plays by Marston, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, Goffe, Harding and others. Whilst Jackson seems to have felt 'the pleasure of privileged witness',[118] others have reacted differently. For Samuel Johnson, famously, the final scene was 'not to be endured'; Voltaire gave the onstage strangulation of Desdemona as a prime instance of ruinous stupidity in English tragedy, turning 'a most touching play' into monstrous farce.[119] The scene's fascinating stage history is testament to concerns over how to preserve decorum in the playhouse (though censorship has sometimes inadvertently served to re-eroticise the scene).[120] According to Lois Potter, 'What seems to have made the end of *Othello* particularly difficult was the fact that husband and wife were seen together not on a tomb but a bed'.[121] The scene's power stems from a play-long intensification as the tragic stakes are raised, with the offstage bed so frequent a focus. *Othello* is not filled with wedding spectacle like many of the works I discuss, but no other play is more preoccupied with the

[118] Meisel 2007: 231-37.
[119] Johnson 1971: 326; Voltaire 1980: 92. Voltaire's own tragedy, *Zaire*, inspired in part by *Othello*, shows the onstage stabbing of the heroine – but not in a bed. (See Willems 2010: 29.)
[120] See Siemon 1986 and Neill 1989.
[121] Potter 2002: 56.

consummation. In almost every scene, it is either attempted (offstage), or discussed, or perversely enacted in a surrogate form.

The debate about propriety is written into the play's final speech from Lodovico, Desdemona's cousin and the representative of Venetian officialdom. This was often cut in nineteenth century productions, perhaps, as Neill suggests, because it 'intolerably… serves to focus attention on what it insists must not be attended to':[122]

> Look on the tragic loading of this bed:
> This is thy work. The object poisons sight,
> Let it be hid. 5.2.361-3.

The closing speech has been found inadequate in its brevity and depersonalising manner. Three bodies are reduced to a single 'object', as if the bed (or bier) has subsumed them already. Lodovico's contrary commands ('Look on'/ 'Let it be hid') give voice to both dismay and discomfort. Various critics argue that we are seduced into voyeuristic collusion with the racist and misogynous violation of the marriage bed. 'Shakespeare and Iago are in this point one', suggests Palfrey, turning us into 'stalkers, voyeurs, priers', making us 'complicit in the violations we abhor'.[123] Boose implicates 'masculine consciousness' in particular, arguing that a 'pornographic aesthetic' is at work, in which the bed becomes 'the fetishized object of aesthetic gratification', a secret pleasure that is at once a matter of 'collective cultural guilt'.[124] According to David Pollard, 'we indulge our own sadomasochistic fantasies in the aesthetically pleasing mayhem on the heroine's wedding sheets'.[125] The titillating eighteenth and nineteenth century frontispieces discussed by Neill in 'Unproper Beds' might seem to validate these views. Could even Jackson's touching account imply a ghoulish erotic fixation with the *beauty* of Desdemona (as played by a boy) on her bride/death-bed? But there is a danger in allowing Iago-think to foul everything. Lodovico's sickened response (for all his expediency as representative of the state) strikes me as heartfelt, as does his shocked earlier reaction to Othello's striking of Desdemona. In staging a marriage bed catastrophe that 'poisons sight', Shakespeare offers, in my view, a repudiation of a 'pornographic aesthetic'.

[122] Neill 1989: 403.
[123] Palfrey 2005: 257.
[124] Boose 2004: 24, 43.
[125] Pollard 1991: 96.

The unconsummated marriage is crucial to the playwright's strategy in this, though it is reasonable to ask what difference it makes. Isn't the tragedy that people die, not that they fail to have sex? Yet Iago does not embark on revenge intent on murder: he looks to madden Othello, to make his delight 'lose some colour', to steal the 'happiness to their sheets' – a variation on the 'stealing joy' action in *Alphonsus*. That he succeeds in doing so in the most terrible way imaginable is an integral part of the tragedy; that he does himself a perverse 'sport' in the process is a major part of its horror. Previous villains, such as Aaron and Alphonsus, or Kyd's Lorenzo and Marston's Piero, take an eroticised pleasure in revenge, but none has the impact of Iago, whom Shakespeare allows so much control of the action. Boose rightly places Iago within the scabrous erotic discourse that emerged in late Elizabethan England, a sexualist-moralist fusion of 'prurient lust and revulsionary loathing'.[126] There is a risk in giving this voice such free and exciting dramaturgical rein. Palfrey links the seductive techniques used by Iago to the wider 'broken nuptials' narrative: 'Just as Iago's narration uses interruption and deferral… sexual satisfaction is interrupted and deferred'.[127] The audience is indeed tempted to see behind the offstage 'door of truth' (3.1.410), swept along with a 'diseased fascination',[128] caught up in Othello's jealous rage and Iago's exponentially increasing perversity. Yet the Iago view of things is gradually confronted, notably by each of the female characters, and even, ultimately, by the men most infected, Othello and Roderigo. Shakespeare critiques an incipient 'pornographic aesthetic', linking it to sexual crime, even as he employs its strategies of spectatorship. But we cannot reduce the play to a moral treatise. For *Othello* to work as tragic art, we must feel Iago's vicarious excitements as much as everyone else's pain. By giving us the inverted consummation 'that kills for loving' (5.2.42) as a surrogate sex scene, Shakespeare brings what is unrepresentable centre stage. As Jackson's 'in our presence' suggests, we feel the full impact of what has been robbed, of what the lovers have never known. The final tableau fulfils Iago's impulse to 'poison… delight' with that which 'poisons sight'.

[126] Boose 1994: 197.
[127] Palfrey 2005: 255.
[128] Neill 1997: 143.

It is worth noting Iago's initial notion of nuptial *delight*. A critic making any such assumption about the lovers would now be considered naïve – rightly, perhaps, since this is a genuinely undecidable matter. Who knows how the wedding night would have gone? And what of the marriage itself? Most modern readings are sceptical about Othello and Desdemona's chances of happiness, emphasising the warning signs, often with good reason; Bradshaw, for example, calls *Othello* a 'tragedy of idealism', in which the inexperienced lovers are 'idealistic in ominously different ways'.[129] It is rare now to encounter the romantic transcendence that held critical sway for so long. F. R. Leavis's necessary attack on the 'sentimental perversity' of A. C. Bradley seems, over time, to have done its work; yet Leavis's notion that the 'tragedy is inherent in the Othello-Desdemona relation' – implying that Othello would have murdered his wife at some point, even without Iago's toxic ministrations – is a perversity too.[130] If no form of romantic accommodation was possible between the lovers they could not, in my view, be the focus of Iago's envy. That the 'constant, loving, noble' Othello will prove 'a most dear husband' (2.1.283-5) is precisely his concern; like the Devil of the Prayer Book, he aims at 'the breach of true concord in heart'. As for sex, if Othello were as incapable or averse as many have suggested, wouldn't the psychologically astute Iago simply let the wedding night proceed? Desdemona shows as much fortitude as disillusion when, on the first day of companionate life, she poignantly states 'Nay, we must think, men are not gods,/ Nor of them look for such observancy/ As fits the bridal' (3.4.149-51). Hierogamous ideals are swiftly eroded, but we should not write off the marriage retroactively. It takes 'honest, honest Iago' to 'catechize the world' for Othello, radicalising him in a misogynous credo (5.2.150, 3.4.16). Iago serves as a diabolic priest, unmarrying the newlyweds, unblessing their bed, turning the act of procreation into an act of uncreation. He plagues their 'fertile climate' just as Milton's Satan, his literary inheritor, desecrates the 'happier Eden'. Shakespeare adapts Cinthio's *novella* to give us something close to foundational myth, in which a seductive 'viper' (5.2.282-4) intrudes on a spousal idyll at the moment of formation, the moment of consummation.

The friar of *Much Ado* reassures the falsely accused Hero: 'Come, lady, die to live; this wedding-day/ Perhaps is but prolong'd' (4.1.253-4). In *Othello*, the role of

[129] Bradshaw 1993: 180-182.
[130] Leavis 1952: 139, 141.

comforter to Desdemona falls, chillingly, to Iago, who works unseen to prolong her nuptials: 'weep not; all things shall be well' (4.2.173). But the slandered-bride plot of romance does not end happily in this instance, and the play has rightly been called 'a terrifying completion of the comedies'.[131] Many critics acknowledge its negation of a 'Lovers, to bed' ending, yet the choice of consummations faced by Othello as he approaches the bride-bed is not widely recognised. To remain in 'a miasma of doubt' over this is to miss the real tragic indeterminacy, which is Othello's own, stood before the marriage bed, torn between Iago's pornographic 'proofs' and his own better instincts. To argue that the marriage remains unconsummated is not to foreclose interpretive possibility; it rather allows us to explore the multiple ironies and syncretic strategies of Shakespeare's 'wedding night tragedy' on a more secure footing. It seems to me that his fellow dramatists understood the implications of the 'delayed consummation' structure, as I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters. Plays soon abound in which defloration becomes the crux of violent or manipulative strategies. Masculine competition to taste the 'first fruits' – or to deny another the pleasure – is a recurring theme, as is female self-determination over where, when or whether to bestow the virginal rose. The delayed or displaced consummation becomes integral to early modern tragedy and its tragicomic variants. *Othello* is both influential and inimitable in this regard: a romantic comedy turned 'the seamy side without' to make the greatest tragedy of love, one intimately enacted – as never before – 'in our presence'.

[131] Neely 1993: 110.

CHAPTER 4

Broken Nuptials and Maimed Rites in Marston's Tragedies

John Marston's career as a playwright c.1599-1607 was relatively brief, but he is credited with a major influence on the course of Jacobean drama. He introduced a bitingly satirical and highly eroticised discourse, bringing, as noted in Chapter 1, the 'learned play' of the Inns of Courts to the professional stage.[1] Each of his plays concerns, to a greater or lesser degree, the theme of marriage formation, and many depict 'broken nuptials' and 'maimed rites'. I also mentioned in Chapter 1 Marston's attempt to synthesise companionate and libertine doctrines with his concept of 'modest amorousness'. He wrestled with 'the problem of the normality of concupiscence' at a time when many 'saw in the unruly passions sure signs of the depravity of man or of his weakness'.[2] In *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, the male romantic lead, Pasquil, dismisses marriage for lust as 'increase of durt', but anticipates his own conjugal bliss 'Clipt in the cincture of a faithfull arme,/ Luld in contended joy, being made divine' (199).[3] In *The Scourge of Villainie*, Marston satirises one *Brutus* for bringing Aretinesque experimentation into marriage, treating his unwilling wife as a whore (I.60-63);[4] yet a reformed husband in his comedy, *The Fawn*, promises to serve his neglected wife 'as more than a mistress' (5.361). Marston's comedies are often conflicted in addressing the sexual expectations of 'virtuous marriage' (*The Dutch Courtesan* 3.1.104). Companionate idealism is satirically questioned in *What You Will*, for example, but the play concludes with festive, licentious imperatives to the young men on stage – 'Court gallants court, suck amorous dalliance' – before the gallants of the *audience* are blessed in the epilogue: 'May your loves happy hit in faire cheekt wives' (294-5).

[1] O'Callaghan 2007: 27. See Finkelpearl 1969 and Boose 1994 on Marston's influence.
[2] Zall 1953: 186-7.
[3] Page references for *Jack Drum* and *What You Will* to the Harvey Wood edition.
[4] Cf. Jonson's 'On Sir Voluptuous Beast'.

Marston often directly addressed those he termed his 'Select and most respected auditors',[5] playgoers who attended boy company performances at London's indoor theatres. Many were young unmarried gentlemen of the Inns of Court, a group to which Marston himself belonged until his marriage in 1605 (he resided for most of his authorial career in the Middle Temple). The literary output associated with the Inns explores a range of romantic and sexual codes and orientations – libertinism, Petrarchism, homoeroticism – but marriage was usually seen as destiny. It was, as Alexandra Shepard observes, 'the gateway to manhood' and 'central to patriarchal privilege', though marriage could be perceived as 'a threat to manhood' should the match prove unhappy or lead to 'love-induced submissiveness'.[6] Marston was by no means solely concerned with male rites of passage, but much of his work addresses the matrimonial hopes and fears of his own social circle. His comedies often contain a serious threat to marriage, such as the rival suitor's acid attack in *Jack Drum* or the discarded mistress's murderous plot in *The Dutch Courtesan,* but tragic consequences are averted or magically undone. Where the threat is stronger, however, where tyranny or treachery is faced, both familial and political, Marston tends to choose the wedding itself as the occasion for tragedy to strike. The fear of a failed transition into stable and fulfilling adulthood looms large, as does the fear of never knowing 'nuptial sweetes' or finding the 'long wish'd celestiall place' (*Jack Drum* 199, 215) at the erotic heart of the companionate ideal.

Most of John Marston's plays dramatise nuptial occasions. Three comedies or tragicomedies, *Antonio and Mellida*, *What You Will* and *The Malcontent*, move toward 'broken nuptials' in the form of interrupted wedding festivities, whilst Marston's tragic plots, *Antonio's Revenge*, *Sophonisba* and *The Insatiate Countess,* all see nuptial proceedings abandoned or displaced. This chapter focuses on his handling of the wedding night and consummation in the first two of these tragedies (I address the third in Chapter 5). I consider Marston's displacement and deferral structures, his innovative stage effects and his extensive focus on 'maimed rites', particularly with regard to the marriage bed.

[5] *Antonio and Mellida* Prologue, 3. Marston wrote for the Children of Paul's 1599-1601, then the Children of the Queen's Revels, 1603-6. See the repertory studies of Shapiro 1977, Gair 1982 and Munro 2005.
[6] Shepard 2003: 74-5, 78, 83.

THE 'MARRIAGE HEARSE' IN *ANTONIO'S REVENGE*

Marston's early diptych, *Antonio and Mellida* (1599) and *Antonio's Revenge* (1600) is highly significant to the development of a 'tragic wedding' convention. The titles suggest how the young male protagonist is called upon to switch from lover to revenger. This shift occurs just as he reaches 'the gateway to manhood': the first play ends on the nuptial eve, the second begins as the wedding day dawns. *Antonio's Revenge* has generated much debate over its artistic merit and level of moral seriousness. For a long time, the play was widely regarded as empty, tasteless and histrionic, a hotchpotch of purple passages and bloody sensationalism. In the 1960s and 70s, however, the burlesque aspects of works written for the boy companies was highlighted. Marston's bold theatrical (and metatheatrical) devices were hailed as precursors to the alienation effects and absurdist discontinuities of radical twentieth century drama. He went from callow *enfant terrible* to an early modern Brecht or Pirandello. Such claims did not go unchallenged,[7] but they extended our view of the Antonio plays, with their shocks and provocations, rapid shifts between sincerity and parody, and knowing nods to audiences fluent in genre-based iconography. Marston often gestured to his discriminating auditors. W. Reavley Gair notes 'the density of literary allusion' in *Antonio's Revenge*, suggesting that Marston positions the play as 'only one example of a tradition greater and more enduring than it'.[8] The tradition most often discussed is that of Senecan revenge drama (numerous parallels with *Hamlet* have been highlighted, for example).[9] Less has been said, however, of the play as an influential romantic tragedy, one in which a nuptial occasion becomes the site of revenge. Both detractors and admirers tend to emphasise the play's dislocations, but a more coherent (and even more innovative) work emerges when we consider its take on the 'tragic wedding'.

Before turning to *Antonio's Revenge*, it is worth considering the theme of what Mark Breitenberg calls 'anxious masculinity' in *Antonio and Mellida* for its bearing on the

[7] Wharton 1994 usefully summarises the debate.
[8] Gair 1978: 19.
[9] See Jackson and Neill 1986: xxv-xxvi for an overview of critical assessments.

overall nuptial design.[10] The titular lovers are the son and daughter of warring fathers, Andrugio, Duke of Genoa, and Piero, Duke of Venice. Marston opens the play after the latter's decisive military victory. Longing for Mellida, Antonio, a fugitive, infiltrates the Venetian court disguised as an Amazon – the ploy used by Pyrocles in Sidney's *Arcadia*. The choice instantly raises questions about masculine identity. Antonio, a hypersensitive youth, swoons or lies down when overwhelmed by circumstance, such as when rival suitors court Mellida. His struggle for self-mastery is evident, as is his failure to live up to his father's Stoic precepts. This inability to 'Make a firm stand' (1.1.33) has phallic implications.[11] Trembling at the approach of Mellida, Antonio summons his manhood: 'press thy spirit forth… double all thy man… Mount, blood… Stand firm on deck when beauty's close-fight's up' (156-64). Marston's jests suggest a measure of insecurity behind the youth's Petrarchan adoration. Piero refers to him contemptuously as a 'carpet-boy' (81), an effeminate stripling, which suggests casting that would highlight his vulnerability.[12] Modern audiences are unlikely to take this weepy, solipsistic figure to heart: Gair calls him 'unheroic and unromantic in almost everything he does', switching 'from a burlesque Romeo to a childlike Hamlet'.[13] But in the Prologue to *Antonio's Revenge*, Marston asks his 'judicious' audience to draw upon their own afflictions in empathetic appreciation of the tragedy. Dismissing anyone 'Uncapable of weighty passion', he welcomes those who know what it is to be 'Nailed to the earth with grief', an image that associates the playgoers with his unstable hero (14, 22). The young playwright worries about his own 'weak' performance too, about his ability to 'beget/ So blest an issue' as a great tragic play, satisfying those that 'pant within this ring' – within the playhouse, that is (9-12, 23). This anxious,[14] eroticised speech, a manifesto for the passions, suggests that some of Antonio's real-life counterparts were similarly tremulous at the approach of manhood.

Marston's focus on subverted nuptial rites is seen when, at the end of *Antonio and Mellida*, the heroine is forced by her father into a politically advantageous marriage. A masque is given 'to solemnise [the] nuptials' eve with pomp' (4.1.259), which a

[10] Breitenberg 1996.
[11] Cf. my discussion of *Romeo and Juliet* 3.3.84-90 in Chapter 2.
[12] Lamb 2009: 17-33 discusses such notions in the light of phallic innuendo elsewhere in the play.
[13] Gair 1991: 27, 39.
[14] I disagree with Gair 1982: 129, who sees Marston's high-flown rhetoric as a sign of confidence.

despondent Mellida attends in night apparel as a protest. Her bawdy cousin, Rosaline, teases her for looking 'lumpish' when ''tis but the loss of an odd maidenhead' (5.2.42-4). The intended husband, Galeatzo, dresses as a fool and attempts to win her over with tiresome Petrarchan conceits and a phallic bauble. The comic music, dance and banter is offset, however, by a 'tragic spectacle' as the body of Antonio is brought onstage in a coffin, also referred to as a 'mournful hearse' (209-10). MacDonald Jackson and Michael Neill note in their edition that early modern biers often had an ornamented canopy, and the possible resemblance to a bed is of interest, given what we shall see in the tragic sequel. Piero, accused of driving Antonio to his death, wishes that his grieving daughter's love could restore the youth – at which point Antonio rises from mock-death to claim Mellida as his bride. Having earlier hoped to drink a health from Antonio's skull (3.2.255),[15] Piero now embraces him as a son and leads the final carousal. The enmity between the fathers is seemingly over: the union will create a new accord between Venice and Genoa. The lovers share a 'melting kiss' (5.2.260) and the nuptial eve is theirs. Mellida's choice of attire now seems a happy one, though the presence of the hearse foreshadows what is to come.

Antonio's Revenge begins on the next morning. Much has been said about the play's tonal dislocations, but in terms of stage time it is close to obeying the classical unities, being set (like *Medea* and *Octavia*) on the wedding day – or on two wedding days, rather, since one is supplanted by another. The tragedy opens with a gloating, blood-smeared Piero. Having murdered the outspoken Feliche, who dared to criticise him in the first play, he tells his accomplice, Strotzo, to 'bind Feliche's trunk/ Unto the panting side of Mellida' (1.1.1-2). The latter is asleep, 'panting', her father implies, in spousal anticipation. Piero has also poisoned Andrugio. We learn that the two had been youthful rivals for the hand of Maria, who became the Duchess of Genoa – and hence Antonio's mother. Piero's revenge is to 'turn a glorious bridal morn/ Unto a Stygian night' (89-90). He will claim that he stabbed Feliche in the heat of the moment, having discovered him in bed with Mellida, 'Clipping the strumpet with luxurious twines' (1.2.231) – an extreme example of the dishonoured bride plot. Andrugio's death is put down to 'The vast delights of his large sudden joys' (1.2.257), insinuating over-indulgence (possibly sexual) at the previous night's entertainment.

[15] Cf. the skull-drinking pledges discussed in Chapter 1.

Piero is no longer the toothless tyrant of the first play, though he functions, arguably, as a comic grotesque. Michael Shapiro notes the blend of horrific spectacle and 'music-hall comedy' as Strotzo continually tries to interrupt his vainglorious master with news that Maria, believing the dukes reconciled, is on her way to Venice.[16] Piero finally responds as a macabre humorist: 'Doth she come?/ By this warm reeking gore, I'll marry her./ Look I not now an inamorate?' (1.1.102-4).[17] The duke is usually considered a burlesque figure,[18] but Marston nevertheless develops a type – the lustful tyrant – that was to become a staple of the Jacobean stage.

The visceral staging of nuptial disturbance is even stronger in the next scene. It begins with the arrival of Maria, who is quickly established as a model wife, 'faithful, modest, chaste' (1.2.54). Her homiletic restraint is contrasted with the babbling concupiscence of her nurse, Nutriche. The latter, woken from a snooze, is interrupted in the middle of an erotic dream:

> Marry, you have disturbed the pleasure of the finest dream, O God! I was even coming to it, la. O Jesu! 'twas coming of the sweetest. I'll tell you now, methought I was married, and methought I spent (O lord, why did you wake me?) and methought I spent three spur-royals on the fiddlers for striking up a fresh hornpipe. Saint Ursula, I was even going to bed – and you – methought my husband was even putting out the tapers – when you – Lord, I shall never have such a dream come upon me as long as –
>
> 1.2.31-42

Marston perhaps draws upon 'A mayde's dream', a bawdy ballad widely distributed in manuscript, which sees a young virgin disturbed at just such a crucial point.[19] Here, however, the reference to St Ursula, a legendary virgin who foresaw her martyrdom in a dream, is part of the joke, since we later learn that the nurse has had four husbands. The most important 'source' for this 'delayed consummation' dream, however, may be the proverb 'After a dream of a wedding comes a corpse'.[20] The nurse's comic turn is threaded with ill-omen. What are the 'panting' dreams of Mellida, with a corpse bound to her side? We learn of Antonio's 'horrid dreams' (114) when he arrives with

[16] Shapiro 1977: 133.
[17] The jest is for a learned audience who would know the Italian *commedia* term for a lover.
[18] Bowers 1940: 120-3, however, found him credible enough in the early part of the play.
[19] See Moulton 2000: 53 for a version of the poem (first line: 'As I lay slumbringe in my bed').
[20] Considered proverbial when recorded in 1639. See Tilley 1950: 172 (D585). Dreams of weddings are seen as bad omens in Heywood's *If you know not me, you know nobody Pt. 1* Vol. I, 238.

a group of fellow nobles to wake the bride; he is a 'bridegroom sad' (96), shaken by apparitions of his father and friend calling for revenge. An aubade is sung, but it fails to wake the bride, which Antonio takes as another bad omen: 'My Mellida, not stirring yet? Umh!' (169). ('Stir' was a common sexual innuendo.) Suspense is heightened as Antonio, reunited with his mother, prepares her to meet his love in hyperbolic terms: 'See, look, the curtain stirs; shine, nature's pride,/ Love's vital spirit, dear Antonio's bride' (206-7). All eyes look to the upper level, where a curtain is drawn to reveal the body of Feliche, '*stabbed thick with wounds*', hanging in the window of Mellida's chamber.

Maimed rites are, as we have seen, a key element of the 'tragic wedding' theatergram. Marston's aubade scene takes the notion of the 'sour good morrow' discussed in Chapter 3 to a gruesome extreme. The audience, knowing that Feliche has been placed in the bedchamber, is primed. But the sight still comes as a shock, one no doubt intensified in the tiny Paul's theatre. Removed from bed to window, the corpse serves as a political warning to any who dare oppose Piero. Antonio's concerns are, of course, more personal: 'What villain bloods the window of my love?/… Awake, thou fair unspotted purity' (208-12). The groom further defends the honour of his bride when Piero enters to denounce the now imprisoned Mellida as 'unchaste,/ Tainted, impure' (216-7); this, and the news of Andrugio's death, leaves Antonio to lament 'A dead father, a dishonoured wife' (281). He considers himself married, though instead of taking each other's hand in church they must do so through a dungeon-grate, as Mellida awaits execution. 'Shall I die thine?', 'Kill me' and 'see me die' are among Mellida's questions and commands, reminders of the 'erotic death' she will not now experience as a bride (2.2.94, 105, 114, 116).

Marston's inventive staging of subverted ritual continues when Antonio, dressed in black on his wedding day, stretches on or beside his father's coffin, which was set on a hearse in the dumb-show that opens Act 2. It remains there, according to Jackson and Neill, as a 'semi-permanent structure', one that may provide an 'unspoken commentary on the action until the end of the play'.[21] Noting that 'a tomb with a draped hearse above it bears a strong and often deliberate resemblance to a curtained

[21] Note on 3.2.72sd and additional note 2.1sd.

four-poster bed', they raise the possibility that the prop later doubles as Maria's bed. This seems to me a near certainty. Marston echoes the visual conflation of tomb and bedroom found in *Romeo and Juliet*. The playwright creates a 'marriage hearse' (to borrow a phrase from Blake's 'London'); in what follows I will attempt to draw out the 'unspoken commentary' behind his use of the prop.

The hearse is utilised in the Act 3.1 dumb-show, which sees the play's second nuptial plot come to the fore. In a miniaturized temptation scene, Maria is approached by Piero '*with seeming amorousness*'; she rejects him, taking refuge at Andrugio's tomb, but the duke bribes her servants, including Nutriche, to intercede on his behalf. Maria appears to capitulate as a passionate Piero '*tears open his breast, embraceth and kisseth her*'. The stage clears for Antonio, dressed in nightgown and nightcap, to enter the church as a clock strikes midnight. As previously noted, this was the traditional time for a nuptial consummation – or, alternatively, for tragic or occult happenings. Antonio approaches the bed-like tomb and imagines creeping in to 'Kiss my cold father's cheek' (3.1.15). The latter's ghost appears, like that of Hamlet's father, to reveal the murder and compel his son to revenge. The bed/tomb conflation is continually reinforced. When Maria arrives, worried for her son's mental health, she repeatedly urges him to bed, but Antonio will only 'sleep in peace' in his father's sepulchre on accomplishing revenge (106). He includes his mother in his list of targets, having heard rumours of her intended marriage: 'I'll come… and couch/ My head in downy mould; but first I'll see/ You safely laid, I'll bring ye all to bed' (100-2). For *bed*, of course, we read (and see) the *tomb*. The church scene then becomes something akin to bedroom farce with Piero, also in nightgown and cap, searching the aisles for Maria. He is accompanied, like almost everyone in the church scene, by pages with torches, a possible reminder of those that would traditionally light the way to the bridal chamber. Piero envisages an all-night chase to catch up with Maria: 'I think we shall not warm our beds today' (134). The statement could also stand, of course, for Antonio and Mellida, on what should have been their wedding night.

As in plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, the wedding night is located in Act 3, at the heart of the play. With the lovers separated, there can be no consummation; instead, Marston presents the onstage murder of Julio, Piero's son, as a negation or perversion of Antonio and Mellida's nuptial union.

Unable to sleep due to bad dreams, Julio follows his father to church. His costume is not specified, but presumably he too would be attired for bed. On encountering Antonio, Julio calls him brother, says that he loves him more than his father, and requests a kiss: 'Buss me' (149). Alone with the boy, Antonio pretends to play with him, whilst dwelling on what seems a heaven-sent opportunity for revenge. The pair's physical intimacy is clear from phrases such as 'chuck, my heart doth leap/ To grasp thy bosom' and 'Griping this flesh' (157-8, 164), which chart a shift from play to violence. Antonio leads Julio to Andrugio's tomb and draws his dagger. He hesitates when the boy pleads not to be hurt, but his father's ghost reappears to spur him on. The murder, perhaps carried out *on* the 'marriage hearse', is cast as an act of love:

> Come, pretty, tender child,
> It is not thee I hate, not thee I kill…
> I love thy soul, and were thy heart lapped up
> In any flesh but in Piero's blood
> I would thus kiss it; but being his, thus, thus,
> And thus I'll punch it. [*Stabs* JULIO] 3.1.178-185.

'Antonio sounds like a psychopath' writes Philip Finkelpearl, suggesting, as have others, that Marston wants to alienate the audience from the revenger.[22] Antonio's declaration of friendship to the 'Sprite of Julio' (203) is certainly hard to credit, given the demented manner in which he mutilates the corpse to 'spurt warm blood' and 'sprinkle… gore' like incense on Andrugio's coffin (195, 210) – an action that G. K. Hunter compares to a Black Mass ritual.[23] Yet some, such as Fredson Bowers, have argued that Marston intended his audience to side with Antonio still, on the grounds that he fulfils the Senecan requirements of a dutiful son.[24] Barbara Baines also suggests that our sympathies remain with Antonio, though she sees his action as standing within an ironic critique of the revenge genre.[25]

As with the murder/sacrifice on a bed/altar in *Othello*, this scene has created a good deal of discomfort and disagreement. I see it as another displaced consummation, although, given that Antonio's vengeful action is in response to his father's death, the nuptial dimension is less immediately apparent. Before I address this aspect further, a

[22] Finkelpearl 1969: 153. Ayres 1972: 374 sees the play as a rejection of the heroic revenger.
[23] See Hunter 1965: xvii.
[24] See Bowers 1940: 124.
[25] Baines 1983: 294.

possible feature of casting should be noted. We know that some Children of Paul's actors doubled up on speaking roles in *Antonio and Mellida*.[26] Roslyn Knutson has demonstrated that this is likely to have occurred in the reopened company's other early productions too.[27] Her chart of doubling options for *Antonio's Revenge* is useful, though I have doubts about her suggestion that the actor playing Mellida would double as Andrugio's ghost,[28] as it would have entailed the removal and reapplication of any make-up used to create 'the terror of [the ghost's] grim aspect' (3.2.88). But the Mellida actor was also available to play Julio, a pairing I consider more probable. We do not know how much continuity of casting there was between the two Antonio plays, but it seems unlikely that significant roles would have been radically redistributed. Knutson suggests a doubling of the Julio and Matzagente parts, yet the actor who played the latter in *Antonio and Mellida* was tall and thin, to suit the description 'He looks like a maypole' (1.1.135). The lead female role, however, would probably have been taken by one of the smaller boys (the character cross-dresses as a page at one point). If doubling occurred at all, a shorter actor would, I believe, have been better suited to play the young boy dandled by Antonio. A Mellida/Julio pairing would also create a family resemblance between the siblings, adding a poignant resonance to lines such as 'For my sister's sake,/ Pray you do not hurt me' (3.1.171-2). But whether or not the same boy took both roles, Marston establishes a connection between brother and sister through the psychosexual murder, as it is played out on or before the tester-tomb.

Little has been said of the scene's erotic aspect, though Michael Scott notes that the killing, committed in a 'frenzy of intoxication and animal lust… has sexual overtones in its climactic quality'.[29] The violence is accompanied by seemingly romantic expressions. Julio's last words, having been stabbed, are acquiescent: 'So you will love me, do even what you will' (187). Antonio hopes that the boy's spirit will be 'twinèd with the softest embrace/ Of clear eternity' (205-6), which sounds similar to the declarations of eternal wedded love found in proximate works by Marston. The playwright travesties the sexual consummation, the 'amorous battle' of the wedding night: we see kissing, holding, gripping, a thrusting phallic blade, the overcoming of

[26] See the Induction 21-29.
[27] Knutson 2001: 82-96.
[28] Gair 1982: 131 makes a similar assumption.
[29] Scott 1978: 16, 18.

virginal resistance (followed by a swooning erotic death), the spurting male orgasm, the bed as sacrificial altar.[30] Viewed this way, with Julio as a substitute Mellida, marital erotic fulfilment is twisted into homoerotic murder. Piero's tyranny has diverted the nuptial course. Whilst Marston satirises homosexual activity in his satires and comedies,[31] he was capable of creating a homoerotic frisson, as in the dreamily suggestive passage of *The Malcontent*, where the despondent Pietro gives his 'short sword' to a pageboy, before another two 'sirenical rascals' enchant him with song (3.4.18, 37). Might part of Antonio's turmoil as he kisses the 'pretty, tender' Julio be erotic (178)? Is he (and the audience) reminded of Mellida dressed as a pageboy for the most amorous exchange in the first part of their history?[32] A tragic focus on wedding rites frequently highlights unstable sexual identities, and erotic ambiguity is a significant part of the church scene's overdetermined effects. Marston presents Antonio as driven to a terrible crime, but perhaps we are expected to retain some sympathy for the thwarted, conflicted bridegroom. Whether this is possible is another matter. The superimposition of the 'erotic death' trope on infanticide is problematic, to say the least, and Julio's last words have a queasily sentimental ring, anticipating the erotic martyrology of Beaumont and Fletcher's heroines.

Marston is innovative in his structuring and staging of the 'tragic wedding' scenario. The 'marriage hearse' becomes a bed in Act 3.2, a tragicomic domestic scene. Maria, due to marry Piero in the morning, weeps in her bedchamber. She is ostensibly comforted by the bribed Nutriche, who argues, like Chaucer's Wife of Bath, for the benefits of successive marriages: 'Andrugio could do well, Piero may do better' (3.2.2-3). Nutriche's own greatest satisfaction came in her fourth marriage to 'the very cockall of a husband' (7). Left alone, Maria approaches her bed in despair:

> O thou cold widow-bed, sometime thrice blest
> By the warm pressure of my sleeping lord,
> Open thy leaves, and whilst on thee I tread
> Groan out, 'Alas, my dear Andrugio's dead!' 3.2.69-72

[30] Donne's Lincoln's Inn epithalamion presents the consummation as a sacrifice.
[31] Sodomitical innuendo surrounds pageboy characters such as Catzo and Dildo in *Antonio and Mellida* and Holifernes Pippo in *What You Will*.
[32] Gair 1982: 130 provides evidence that regular playgoers could be expected to recall earlier episodes. Smith 1994: 72-3 reveals 'the homosexual potentiality in male bonding' fostered in the Inns of Court; Lamb 2009 45-55 discusses child performers as the focus of desire, often homoerotic.

The personified bed will keep Andrugio in her remembrance, even as she guiltily consummates her second marriage ('tread' was another common innuendo).[33] Maria draws back the curtain '*and the Ghost of* ANDRUGIO *is displayed sitting on the bed*' – visual shocks being something of a Marstonian hallmark. From the marriage bed, the ghost-husband berates his wife's 'strumpet blood' and disloyalty to 'hymeneal rites' (74-5). (Marston skates over her agreement to remarry, far hastier even than Gertrude's in *Hamlet*, merely presenting her as easily manipulated.) The ghost relents at her tears, however, going on to blame Piero and to regret female weakness; having converted Maria to his vengeful cause, he swaps places with her, drawing the bed-curtains in an act of spousal tenderness from beyond the grave. The exchange is swift, but of some moment: the play pre-dates *Othello* in showing a married couple alone in a bedroom together, perhaps for the first time – though the fact that one party is dead does rather militate against a sense of intimacy.

Marston's fusion of death- and marriage-bed brings 'tragic wedding' symbolism centre stage in a newly domestic sphere. His visual inventiveness extends to costumes too. Mellida dressed in a 'dumpish' fashion for the forced marrige in *Antonio and Mellida*; now she dresses as a bride for her trial at Piero's insistence:

> Produce the strumpet in her bridal robes
> That she may blush t'appear so white in show
> And black in inward substance 4.1.80-82

The duke still plans to unite her with Galeatzo, after framing Antonio for the murder of his father and for the plot against Mellida. Antonio has meanwhile adopted a disguise as Maria's 'baubled fool' (4.1.19), which recalls Galeatzo's costume for the masque in the prequel. Having rumoured himself dead once more (drowned in a lovelorn suicidal leap), he watches helplessly as Mellida faints at the news and is borne offstage to her 'private bed' (230).[34] Antonio follows her to the bedchamber where, it is reported, Mellida seemed to die with the words 'I fly to clip my love, Antonio', but was briefly called back by her lover's screech as he 'pressed unto the

[33] See entry in Williams.
[34] We might wonder, given that this is Antonio's third use of the ploy, why she believes it so readily. See the opening and closing scenes of *Antonio and Mellida*. Note also the suicidal responses of Katherine in *Jack Drum* and Beatrice in *The Dutch Courtesan* at false reports of a lover's death.

bed' (310, 313) – the closest they come to sharing the nuptial bed. A dawning moment of recognition is suggested on Mellida's part as she ebbs away:

> her bright eyes 'gan ope
> And stared upon him; he, audacious fool,
> Dared kiss her hand, wished her soft rest, loved bride;
> She fumbled out, 'Thanks, good', and so she died. 4.1.315-18

It is hard to see an audience being especially moved by this mawkish apotheosis. Mellida has a largely emblematic role in this play (unlike the first); her broken-hearted offstage demise cannot compare for affective impact with those of numerous other tragic heroines. Nevertheless, the death of a 'virgin wife' would soon become a resonant trope on the early modern stage.

The arch pathos (or perhaps bathos) of the deathbed account is intensified when we consider the ludicrousness of Antonio in his fool's habit – a disguise that leads both his mother and his friend, Alberto, to question his self-mastery and judgement. Where Hamlet keeps his wits about him in his madness, running rings round king and court, Antonio opts to play a witless fool, envying the 'honest, senseless dolt' his inability to feel misfortune (4.1.52). The main verbal challenges to Piero come from Alberto and Pandulpho, Feliche's father. The latter's stoic extremism prompts one of Marston's most moving lines when he is finally overtaken by grief: 'Man will break out, despite philosophy' (4.2.69). It is harder to sympathise with Antonio, though, even after Mellida's death. Still dressed as a fool, lamenting as a 'weak, weak child' before God (4.2.14), his self-pity reaches new heights – or depths. Mid-speech, he '*lieth upon his back*', either on the ground or on the hearse, should it remain on stage.[35] Having seen Mellida as a corpse-bride, Antonio, all desire annihilated, longs for the moment when death will 'like to a stifling incubus,/ Lie on my bosom' (4.2.21-2).[36] His wish is literalised in solemn if near-farcical manner when Pandulpho and Alberto arrive with 'FELICHE*'s trunk in a winding sheet, and lay it thwart* ANTONIO*'s breast*'. Does Marston create what Phoebe Spinrad calls a 'crucifixion tableau', as part of the play's disturbing 'sacralization of revenge'?[37] Or does the tableau connote, as Scott suggests,

[35] Jackson and Neill note the evocation of tomb-sculpture, as when Antonio lies down at 2.2.134.
[36] Cf. the 'incubus/ That rides [Piero's] bosom' (1.1.90-1).
[37] Spinrad 2005: 179-80.

a marriage with death?[38] It is hard to know what Marston intended, though it is worth noting that Antonio and Mellida both lie with Feliche's corpse. Are we served another reminder – before Antonio rouses himself for a final revenge – of the displaced consummation? Almost every scene in the play seems to offer, visually or verbally, a nuptial negative.

Andrugio's ghost enters the Act 5 dumb-show 'tossing his torch about his head in triumph', recalling Piero (1.1) and Antonio (3.2) as vengeful torch-bearers, as well as the bridal chamber Furies of classical tragedy.[39] The play concludes, like *Antonio and Mellida*, with a wedding eve masque. Despite his daughter's death and unaware, as yet, of his son's, Piero presses on with his marriage to Maria. He boasts of military and sexual prowess, vowing to bring a vigorous life to the bridal chamber compared with Andrugio, 'the sapless log that pressed thy bed/ With unpleasing weight' (5.3.5-6). (Another image of a deathly burden in bed.) Crying '*Io* to Hymen', Piero calls for a banquet in erotic anticipation: 'We'll taste some sweetmeats, gallants, ere we sleep' (51). Senecan (and Kydian) horror follows: the cutting out of Piero's tongue, the serving up of Julio's limbs – in lieu of aphrodisiac delicacies – and the choreographed stabbing of the tyrant. No doubt such *Grand Guignol* effects were part of what 'astonished the theatre-going public of early seventeenth-century London'.[40] Marston spearheaded the innovative staging of sex and violence that was to become such a feature of the era. The sensationalism belongs, however, within an intelligent and original design, as Marston develops 'tragic wedding' symbolism over the length of the play. Does the 'marriage hearse' remain onstage to the end? Might it serve as a banquet table, and as a sacrificial altar once again, for the killing of Piero? This could be a conjecture too far. Given the detail of Marston's stage directions elsewhere, would he be silent over this? Yet the banquet must be placed on *something*, and we are told that curtains are drawn to cover Piero's body (153sd). These could be the curtains of a separate discovery space – or those of a highly versatile 'marriage hearse'. The direction 'PIERO *departeth*' after the curtains are drawn suggests the

[38] Scott 1978: 20.
[39] The soliloquy that follows opens with lines from *Octavia*.
[40] Gair 1978: 6.

need to clear the space for another purpose, and here again the hearse seems likely to have come into play for 'the formal interment of Mellida during the final song'.[41]

True rites as opposed to maimed rites are reasserted at the last. Antonio declares his intention to 'entomb my love' and weep over her 'hearse', before committing himself to a life of religious retreat and celibacy: 'For her sake here I vow a virgin bed' (154-7). This death of desire is significant, given the febrile erotic discourse of the Antonio plays, as performed to a 'choice audience' of young gallants (183). Antonio may be unique in surviving as a revenger, but as a lover he is eviscerated. His transition to manhood through marriage fails. The resonance of his vow would be greater still if Mellida were indeed laid to rest in a four-poster tomb. Perhaps this is to overstate the 'tragic wedding' as a unifying principle in *Antonio's Revenge*. Marston overeggs the tragical pudding so blatantly – think of the hilariously intrusive Sir Jeffrey Balurdo – that Rick Bowers' assessment of the play as a gleeful parody, 'Rude, crude, and theatrically unglued', might seem apt.[42] Yet Antonio's final speech, which serves as the epilogue, locates Mellida's death at the heart of a tragedy written in tribute to 'th'immortal fame of virgin faith' (5.3.177). Marston insists upon affective impact: 'Instead of claps may it obtain but tears' (185). Rightly or wrongly, the author identifies *Antonio's Revenge* – in a way that critical tradition has not – as first and foremost a *romantic* tragedy. Marston's emblematic stagecraft, uniquely centred on the 'marriage hearse', provides significant cohesion in this respect. But it is in *Sophonisba*, a 'fatal marriage' play written five years later, that his handling of tragic form finally caught up with his runaway dramaturgical instincts.

'VIRTUE PERFORCE IS VICE': CEREMONIAL AND INFERNAL NUPTIALS IN *SOPHONISBA*

John Marston's *The Wonder of Women*, or *The Tragedy of Sophonisba* (1605-06) is one of the most neglected and least understood major dramatic works of its era. With

[41] Jackson and Neill surmise this action - note to 5.3.154-9.
[42] Bowers 2000: 15.

its exotic locations, love rivalry, political machinations, battles, supernatural thrills, lustful villain, compromised hero, and brave, beautiful heroine, Marston's *Sophonisba* would appear to have everything. Yet many have seen the play as dull and forbidding, a foursquare, bombastic, high-minded dud.[43] Most critics have emphasised its formal austerity, locating *Sophonisba* securely in the neoclassical tradition. T. S. Eliot calls the play 'Senecal rather than Shakespearean'; for Philip Finkelpearl, it has 'more affinities with *Gorbuduc* than with the nearly simultaneous *King Lear*'.[44] Irving Ribner finds it an 'exercise in Senecan imitation' that does not 'reflect [an] agonized struggle with the realities of the dramatist's own age'.[45] Some regard Marston's claim not to have laboured 'to relate anything as an historian, but to enlarge everything as a poet' as artistic hubris.[46] Craving validation from 'worthier minds', the poet-dramatist presents the play as produced for 'such as may merit oil/ And holy dew stilled from diviner heat' (Prologue, 19, 23-4). But far from being a lofty, vatic masterpiece, his paean to the perfection of Sophonisba has been found tediously sententious, a work of 'patent artificiality of subject and moral assumptions'.[47]

Most of the play's detractors do at least note its theatricality in comparison with other neoclassical works, if only to decry an intrusive sensationalism. Ironically, such complaints often make the play sound more exciting than some of its defenders manage, many of whom stress the starkness of its playworld. Jackson and Neill suggest, somewhat optimistically, that its 'austerely monumental character… need prove no bar to its theatrical resurrection', whilst William Kemp praises Marston's 'simple' archetypes, 'unadulterated by… psychological and symbolic complexity' – which hardly makes the characters sound involving.[48] To be fair, Kemp highlights the resourcefulness of Marston's staging, describing the play as no mere academic exercise, unlike the 'dead plays… flat, unactable things' produced for university stages; Marston's blend of neoclassicism and populist melodrama is, he suggests, 'probably better in production than in reading'.[49] For Kemp, writing in 1979, behind

[43] See, for example, the chapters on *Sophonisba* in McDonald 1966 and Finkelpearl 1969.
[44] Eliot 1951: 233; Finkelpearl 1969: 251.
[45] Ribner 1962: 13-14.
[46] From the address 'To the General Reader', which is usually seen as a swipe at Jonson's overly scholastic approach in *Sejanus*.
[47] Blostein 1978: 11-12.
[48] Jackson and Neill 1986: 400; Kemp 1979: 22-3.
[49] Kemp 1979: 23, 32.

that ‘probably’ lay four hundred years of (to my knowledge) non-performance. There has since been one attempt to stage *Sophonisba*, but no full-scale production.[50] Few have called for a revival, yet T. F. Wharton, who maintains that ‘theatricality is the core of [Marston’s] talent’, sees the play as his masterpiece.[51] I agree, and what follows – under the aegis of addressing *Sophonisba* as a ‘wedding night tragedy’ – is a piece of advocacy for what I see as a taut, rich and highly performable play.

Sophonisba owes much to *Othello*, I believe, as a pacy, moving play structured around a series of displaced consummations. I hope to question its reputation as ‘a formal, austere tragedy’, to probe what I see as its ‘psychological and symbolic complexity’, and to make a case for its power to move an audience. This is not to suggest that Marston’s tragedy offers no pleasures for a *reader* – the verse, despite some knotty or starchy moments, is better than some critics allow.[52] Eliot detected poetic strength, though his praise – ‘the most nearly adequate expression of [Marston’s] distorted and obstructed genius’ – is amusingly qualified.[53] An appreciation of the play needs, however, to take full account of its dramaturgy, where Marston ignores many classical conventions, whilst drawing unabashedly on populist approaches and experimenting with a variety of visual and aural effects. More recent commentary on the play has acknowledged what Scott calls its ‘totality of dramatic experience’,[54] though the appreciation of localised effects has not always shed light on *Sophonisba* as a whole. My focus on the ‘tragic wedding’ plot will not, of course, illuminate all aspects of the play,[55] but it will, I hope, draw out various remarkable ways in which Marston stages his blend of Roman history and romance.

Sophonisba was written for the Children of the Queen’s Revels, a boy company that by 1605-06 would have included some fairly mature adolescents, able to handle

[50] Headfirst Theatre performed a shortened version at the White Bear Theatre, London, 1991, with a cast of five actors (dir. Nigel Ward). Charles Cathcart informs me that the cuts and doubling resulted in a lack of clarity, an impression confirmed in a brief *City Limits* review of the production (Shuttleworth 1991). A staged reading of *Sophonisba* has also been performed as part of the Globe Theatre’s ‘Read Not Dead’ series.
[51] Wharton 1994: 105.
[52] Finkelpearl 1969: 249-53 calls the language ‘undramatic’ ‘absurd’ ‘frigid’ and ‘sententious’; McDonald 1966: 159 decries its ‘rhetorical overtness and unpoetic mechanicalness’.
[53] Eliot 1951: 230.
[54] Scott 2000: 225.
[55] The best overview is still probably Ure’s ‘reconsideration’ from 1949.

speeches that 'demand real virtuosity from individual performers'.[56] Marston appended a note to the Quarto edtion: 'let me entreat my reader not to tax me for the fashion of the entrances and music of this tragedy, for know, it is printed only as it was presented by youths, and after the fashion of the private stage'. His instinct told him to retain his stage directions, even if they might be deemed intrusive or unworthy in a printed tragic poem. Marston does not necessarily, in my view, apologise for the manner in which his tragedy was staged, as some have suggested.[57] Rather, as Lucy Munro puts it, 'Marston actively negotiates with the fact of his performance, and with the specifics of that performance'.[58] Genevieve Love's analysis of *Sophonisba*'s stage directions focuses on erotic representation in its three bedchamber scenes. My discussion follows suit, but with more emphasis on how theatrical effects serve characterisation and the narrative arc. H. Harvey Wood describes one of these scenes, the Erictho episode, as 'of the same character as those bedroom deceptions in which the Restoration audiences delighted. It belongs in spirit to the London of Aphra Behn, not the Carthage of Hannibal'.[59] Marston's tragedies are disfigured, Wood suggests, by his crass populist instincts, his appeals to the 'baser' as opposed to the 'graver' sort.[60] It is precisely this blend of *base* and *grave,* of bedroom farce and elevated tragedy, which we might rather value in Marston's drama of the wedding night.

Renaissance stagings of the Sophonisba story tend to fall short because the noble Carthaginian protagonist, so wily and passionate in the historical sources, is made a bland, if undeniably brave, pattern of virtue.[61] Marston's alternative title, *The Wonder of Women*, presents his heroine as a cynosure, but the playwright energises the narrative in crucial ways. He brilliantly synthesises the two main sources (Livy and Appian), blending affairs of the heart with those of the state, 'broken nuptials' with political treachery;[62] he makes youthful figures of the rival kings, Massinissa and Syphax, who represent opposing modes of masculinity in their contention over Sophonisba;[63] he introduces the witch, Erictho, to the story, for one of the era's most

[56] Munro 2005: 143.
[57] Corbin and Sedge 1986: 4-5; Jackson and Neill 1986: 481.
[58] Munro 2005: 145.
[59] Wood 1939: x.
[60] Wood 1939: x-xi; xxvi Marston himself declared a conventional indifference to the 'popular frown': *Sophonisba* Prologue: 27.
[61] See the discussion of Trissino's version in Chapter 1.
[62] For Marston's use of sources see Geckle 1980: 177-201, and Corbin and Sedge 1986: 5-6.
[63] Syphax is an older man in the sources.

sensational scenes of the uncanny; and he avoids strict adherence to dramatic unities, liberating the action in a range of settings from the bedroom to the battlefield. Above all, in a major change from the sources, he makes Sophonisba a virgin *bride* within a 'delayed consummation' narrative structure, separating the lovers, and thus turning them into romance figures in a world of realpolitik.

Sophonisba opens with a formally balanced dumb-show that demonstrates the play's romantic oppositions, whilst suggesting its love-versus-duty and 'maimed rites' themes. Two '*troops*' enter from opposite doors and '*stand still*' as the Prologue is spoken. One is a Carthaginian wedding party, including Sophonisba in bridal attire. The other is a troop of Numidians led by Syphax, '*armed from top to toe*'. Marston adapts Appian's narrative so that Sophonisba and Massinissa are married, not just betrothed, though, crucially, the marriage is not yet consummated. (As we have seen, Shakespeare's adaptation of Cinthio for *Othello* places the newlyweds in a similar situation.) Syphax, the rejected suitor,

> grows black, for now the night
> Yields loud resoundings of the nuptial pomp:
> Apollo strikes his harp, Hymen his torch,
> Whilst louring Juno, with ill-boding eye,
> Sits envious at too forward Venus. Lo,
> The instant night; Prologus 14-19.

The gods of marriage seek to protect the bride and groom from Venus, the champion of Syphax's concupiscent cause. The word 'instant', meaning pressing or urgent, conjures the nuptial here-and-now, as love and war converge. The wedding party departs to a military march, leaving Syphax to deliver expository speeches which show him driven (at this stage at least) as much by wounded pride as lust. Brooding upon reputation and shame, his rage is, like Piero's in *Antonio's Revenge*, rooted in rejection: Carthage has 'slighted Syphax' love' by choosing 'one less great than we' (1.1.57, 68). He feels compelled, as a king, to take revenge, perhaps against his better judgement. Shoring himself up with amoral maxims – 'Passion is reason when it speaks from might'; 'that's lawful which doth please' (1.1.76; 4.1.190) – Syphax embodies unbridled tyranny and a twisted Epicureanism.

The bridal chamber scene that follows repays close attention; its subtleties have not always been appreciated, with the result that interpretations of the love story often get off on the wrong foot. Sophonisba enters the bedchamber '*in her night attire*', accompanied by waiting-women. Her opening commands – 'Watch at the doors; and till we be reposed/ Let no one enter. Zanthia, undo me' (1.2.1-2) – afford the audience a sense of privileged access. The Blackfriars, as a candlelit indoor theatre, would have added to the sense of domestic intimacy.[64] An erotic, taboo-breaking current may have been felt in the theatre as the bride was readied for bed, given that this is a royal bedchamber on the wedding night, something not previously staged (as far as we can tell). The playgoers become like the personified candles of *Antonio and Mellida*, able to spy into 'nocturnal court delights' (3.2.6). A voyeuristic impulse runs through Marston's work – 'O, if that candlelight were made a poet' (3.2.12) – but here the tone is delicately comic rather than prurient or titillating. Sophonisba protests over delays 'forced by ceremony', creating 'Long expectations, all against known wishes' (1.2.10, 12).[65] She boldly acknowledges her desire, disdaining the role of coy bride: 'We must still seem to fly what we most seek' (13). Yet as soon as music announces Massinissa's approach, she insists on ceremony: laid '*in a fair bed*', with curtains drawn, she calls ('help, keep yet the doors!') for a customary mock-barring of the groom (34). A mix of anticipation and apprehension is touchingly conveyed. Her maid, Zanthia, pitches in with some fescinnine innuendo, joking about her girdle ('*You had been undone if you had not been undone*') and the height of her shoes ('Tis wonder, madam, you tread not awry') (4, 30).[66] Zanthia admits the bridegroom with a blessing on her mistress: 'Fair fall you lady' (35). But amidst the good humour ominous notes are struck. Zanthia, who argues *for* ceremony, suggests that without 'civil fashion' women 'fall to all contempt' (25-6). Each of her jests unwittingly foreshadows a tragic 'fall', a going 'awry', or being 'undone' – as well as Zanthia's own treacherous role in the attempt to 'undo' Sophonisba.

[64] Dessen's contention 1984: 91 that 'a bed is not a bedroom' should be borne in mind. He argues that Elizabethan viewers, not steeped in naturalism, 'probably would have inferred a general sense of locale' from a bed placed on a bare stage, rather than having the sense of a 'room'. Richardson 2006: 116, 127 suggests that the use of a bed together with detailed domestic action and 'webs of materialistic language' helps to create 'an almost mimetic sense of a bed chamber' in some plays.
[65] Cf. Dekker's *Satiromastix*: 'what a miserable thing tis to be a noble Bride, there's such delays… keeping Mistris Bride so long up from sweeter Revels' 1.1.46-50.
[66] Heels were associated with wantonness; tread was a slang term for sex. See Williams 1994.

The ceremonial aspects of the nuptial occasion are richly drawn. Massinissa enters '*in his night-gown*' accompanied by Carthaginian nobles and captains, including Asdrubal, Sophonisba's father, along with four boy-cupids who dance to a '*fantastic measure*' and '*draw the curtains, discovering* SOPHONISBA *to whom* MASSINISSA *speaks*' (35sd). The last phrase is significant, given that the bridegroom's words actually address Juno and Apollo (Carthage's patron): 'You powers of joy, gods of a happy bed', who 'give modest heat/ And temperate graces!' (36, 39-40). This signals sexual restraint, but before we assign, as some have done, a romantic coolness to Massinissa, we should remember that he is at this point on public show in the bridal chamber. The groom's *attention* is certainly directed toward his bride, upon whom he advances; the actor playing Massinissa must reach the bed by the phrase 'temperate graces', for here he '*draws a white ribbon forth the bed, as from the waist of* SOPHONISBA', calling out 'Lo, I unloose thy waist./ She that is just in love is godlike chaste./ *Io* to Hymen!' (40-42). The maiden girdle is, with a flourish, 'undone'. A chorus of '*cornets, organ, and voices*' ensues. All of these features have an affective impact. Utilising the collective skills of the Children of the Queen's Revels, Marston generates an impressive 'informational polyphony'.[67] As Love notes, the scene's 'striking visual and aural effects… heighten playgoers' anticipation of the consummation'.[68] Again, the ceremonials serve to further delay the actual union: Sophonisba retains her maidenhead despite the symbolic untying of her virgin-knot. Given what follows, this could be a stage-emblem for which T. S. Eliot, an admirer of the play, could supply the motto: 'Between the motion/ And the Act/ Falls the Shadow'.[69]

Marston presents a tension between decorum and desire throughout the scene. The suddenly coy or fearful princess had withdrawn behind the bed-curtains, but once she is 'discovered' and under public scrutiny she dismisses again the 'modest silence' and 'bashful feignings' (42, 45) expected of a bride:

> What I dare think I boldly speak:
>
> After my word my well-bold action rusheth.
>
> In open flame then passion break!

[67] Barthes' notion of theatricality, 1972: 262.
[68] Love 2003: 3.
[69] 'The Hollow Men', section V.

Where virtue prompts, thought, word, act never blusheth 1.2.47-50.

This is in line (albeit in more serious vein) with the healthy concupiscence asserted by some of Marston's comic heroines.[70] The sense of outspokenness is reminiscent of Desdemona too, proclaiming her desires before the senate. Further choruses to Hymen follow, but the 'gods of a happy bed' do not prove propitious. According to Gair, Marston's use of the masque is 'fully integrated into the dramatic form';[71] Gair does not specify the form, but shows an implicit understanding of this as a 'broken nuptials' scenario. Just as the ceremony reaches its climax, the bridal chamber is entered – penetrated – by a senator, Carthalon, '*his sword drawn, his body wounded, his shield struck full of darts;* MASSINISSA *being ready for bed*' (62sd). The form is rooted in romance, but again we see the 'delayed consummation' structure being adapted, as in *Othello*, to a tragic end.

The staging here has great immediacy. Some might consider the Nuntius-style report that follows, telling of an attack launched by the Romans and Syphax, a neoclassical yawn, but it is a vivid account (and no longer than comparable passages in Marlowe and Shakespeare). What is the impact on the bride and groom? According to Love, the intrusion does not make this a tale of 'unfulfilled desire' since Sophonisba and Massinissa 'react to this news less with disappointment about their deferred wedding night than with excitement about defending Carthage'.[72] Leonora Brodwin believes that neither lover 'shows the slightest displeasure', since they 'seem threatened by their own physical desires' and 'would seem to really prefer a completely chaste love devoted exclusively to the "godlike gaine" of honorable death'.[73] If we take the lovers' closing speeches in the scene at face value, we might well agree. Sophonisba, a fiercely patriotic figure in the sources, urges her husband to 'Fight for our country; vent thy youthful heat/ In fields, not beds'; Massinissa calls her 'Wondrous creature… a pattern/ Of what can be in woman!' before marching off in search of glory (216-17, 227-30). As the sun rises and triumphal music swells – twin Apollonian blessings – the pair's reputation as figures of epic restraint seems justified. Such a reading ignores, however, Sophonisba's earlier expressions of desire. In my view, her

[70] Eg. Dulcimel in *The Fawn* and Crispinella in *The Dutch Courtesan*.
[71] Gair 2000: 40.
[72] Love 2003: 3.
[73] Brodwin 1971: 75.

suppressed passion in the face of political imperatives needs to be understood – the affective power of the play as a whole depends upon it.

And what of Massinissa? Love's claim that he 'departs for war without another word to his bride' is incorrect,[74] though he certainly considers himself 'prest to satisfaction' first and foremost as a soldier (190), swapping night-gown for armour with great alacrity. Sukanya Senapati sees Marston as dramatising 'the patriarchal privileging of the public, homo-social bond above the private heterosexual bond'; this is certainly a major theme of the play, but it is problematic when applied here, especially when Senapati goes on to claim that 'Massinissa's eager abandonment of his nuptials in favour of the battlefield' demonstrates a 'deep terror of female sexuality and heterosexual relationships'.[75] The pyschoanalytical assumptions that lie behind this chimes with what some have identified in Othello. There are significant parallels between their situations, with both called upon to put military duty first on their wedding night. As with Othello before the senate, Massinissa stoically reassures the assembled lords of his libidinous restraint:

> What you with sober haste have well decreed
> We'll put to sudden arms; no, not this night,
> These dainties, this first-fruits of nuptials,
> That well might give excuse for feeble ling'rings,
> Shall hinder Massinissa. Appetite,
> Kisses, loves, dalliance, and what softer joys
> The Venus of the pleasing'st ease can minister,
> I quit you all. Virtue perforce is vice;
> But he that may, yet holds, is manly wise. 1.2.196-204

'Manly' honour takes precedence over effeminate dalliance, but, again as with Othello, the public role of Massinissa needs to be taken into account. Could what Senapati calls his 'scornful abjurations of sexual pleasures' be seen in a different light?[76] 'Virtue perforce is vice' suggests an ambiguity at least. Might there not be a sense of regret here, as Massinissa dwells upon the wedding night he actually desired, one that was not, after all, to be passed in 'modest heat', but in lingering sensual

[74] Love 2003: 3.
[75] Senapati 2000: 134.
[76] Senapati 2000: 134

indulgence? Did he truly wish the temperate Juno for a presiding deity – or was he privately hoping for an Ovidian Venus?

I favour this reading. Marston follows Peele, Marlowe, Shakespeare and others in showing how the wider social world impinges on love's rites. Massinissa's avowal of masculine self-control is, in part at least, political. This is how the speech concludes:

> Lo then, ye lords of Carthage, to your trust
> I leave all Massinissa's treasure. By the oath
> Of right good men stand to my fortune just.
> Most hard it is for great hearts to mistrust. 1.2.205-9

Sophonisba is his treasure, but will she remain so? The insistence on 'sudden arms' that leaves the marriage unconsummated also leaves it vulnerable. Both he and Sophonisba acknowledge that her 'choice of love' has endangered Carthage (167, 189). Massinissa has no doubts over his duty; he is honour-bound to fight. But despite his professed faith in Carthage, an underlying 'mistrust' is implied. Intuition tells him that he is being outflanked. Sensing the weakness of his position, he calls on the homosocial 'oath/ Of right good men'. Carthalon reassures him of loyal support – 'We vow by all high powers' (209) – yet it is he who argues for Carthage to 'break all faith/ With Massinissa' in the very next scene: 'Let's gain back Syphax, making him our own/ By giving Sophonisba to his bed' (2.1.7-10). This is no monolithic patriarchy; treacherous undercurrents should be felt in the bedchamber scene. For all their dutiful compliance, the lovers are wary. Massinissa is not 'eager' to abandon the bridal bed through sexual timidity or insecurity – though he may fear, like Othello, an overmastering passion that will hinder 'manly' duty. His attempt to distance himself from Sophonisba arises not from aversion but *desire*: 'Peace, my ears are steel;/ I must not hear thy much-enticing voice' (1.2.211-12).

Marston handles the public-private tensions of the bedroom scene with great subtlety. There is opportunity, when Massinissa and Asdrubal go offstage to change, for another touch of comedy as Sophonisba addresses the remaining lords. They are silent and no doubt awkward as she runs on in a 'loose-formed speech', delivered 'From the most ill-graced hymeneal bed/ That ever Juno frowned at' (175-7). Her speech is at once submissive and defiant, a mix of patriotic fervour and thwarted passion: the

princess is willing for Massinissa to 'leave his wife a very maid,/ Even this night' for the sake of Carthage, but she also regrets that 'sudden horror should intrude 'mong beds/ Of soft and private loves' (158-9, 161-2). Sophonisba suppresses desire, declaring as Massinissa departs, 'By thee I have no lust/ But of thy glory', but she too is politic, sensing that loyalties are about to be tested. Why else does she remark that should her husband abandon the cause of Carthage she 'will not love him, yet must honour him,/ As still good subjects must bad princes' (173-4)? Divided loyalties come to the fore in the senate scene that follows, where, learning of the plot to give her to Syphax and to murder Massinissa, Sophonisba scorns the machiavellian senators but is powerless to alter their decree: 'Carthage owes (ie. owns) my body;/ It is their servant' (2.1.140-1). She declares herself a tragic paradox, 'a miracle of life,/ A maid, a widow, yet a hapless wife', and later envies 'poor maids, that are not forced/ To wed for state, nor are for state divorced' (2.1.152-3; 4.1.35-6). Premonitions of betrayal should inform the lovers' brave-faced parting in the nuptial chamber.

The loosening of Sophonisba's girdle, then, concerns more than her private being. She remains in a liminal state, a 'virgin wife'. Massinissa hails her as his guarantor on the battlefield: 'He's sure unconquered in whom thou dost dwell,/ Carthage'[s] Palladium' (1.2.231-2). He identifies himself with the city, and his bride with the totem that protected Troy – until it was removed and the city fell. There may also be an implied sense of her virginity having a protective importance too, given the *Roman* Palladium and its association with vestal virgins. In the classical world generally, 'The maidenhead of city goddesses seems to have been in some magical sympathy with the unbroken defence of a city'.[77] Massinissa and Sophonisba are often deemed uncomplicated emblems of virtue, but Marston shows them to have a sceptical side. Massinissa addresses Sophonisba, but his message is to the senators too, warning them to keep his wife within the city, her virginity intact, or pay the price. But the message goes unheeded: the curtained bride-bed, that here seems a temple, with Sophonisba its idol, is to reappear in Cirta, in the chamber of Syphax.

The second wedding night scene, Act 3.1, maintains a sense domestic intimacy, but it opens with a visceral physicality that belies the play's reputation for static

[77] Knight 1967: 237. Knight notes that a woman's 'girdle of maidenhead' is released before the wooden horse is admitted in myths of Troy's fall (the same Greek word is used for girdle and wall).

neoclassical reserve: 'SYPHAX, *his dagger twon about her hair, drags in* SOPHONISBA *in her nightgown petticoat*'. Despite her agreement to the senate, Sophonisba has made her loathing perfectly clear to her new husband: 'Must we entreat, sue to such squeamish ears?' (3.1.1). We learn in Act 2 that Syphax, recklessly confident of victory, leaves the battlefield early, 'Impatient Sophonisba to enjoy' (2.3.60). He has nothing of Massinissa's duty-first principle. Threatening rape in lurid terms – 'Look, I'll tack thy head/ To the low earth, whilst strength of two black knaves/ Thy limbs all wide shall strain' (3.1.9-11) – Syphax forces a tearful Sophonisba to the floor and and pins her there. The contrast with the ceremonial decorum of the Act 1 bedchamber could not be starker: here is the warned-of lack of 'civil fashion'. Sophonisba is defiant: 'Thou mayst enforce my body, but not me' (15). But when Syphax proclaims Massinissa dead, Sophonisba changes tack, playing for time, a dissembling heroine. She flatters Syphax, suggesting – 'O, my sex, forgive!' – that women do not respond to 'timorous modesty' but to assertive masculine force (29, 31). Marston has her delineate what we might now call the Byronic hero of masochistic romantic fantasy:

> Know, fair prince,
> Love's strongest arm's not rude; for we still prove
> Without some fury there's no ardent love.
> We love our love's impatience of delay;
> Our noble sex was only born t'obey
> To him that dares command 3.1.33-38

This sails close to the wind, as it could seem an authentic preference, making Massinissa seem 'timorous' by comparison. Like a resourceful heroine of Greek romance, Sophonisba coyly keeps Syphax at bay as he attempts to kiss her. She inveigles the chance to fulfil her vow to make a 'most, most private sacrifice, before/ I touched a second spouse' (55-6). Does she intend suicide? Quite possibly, though I do not consider her wedded to the idea of a noble death in an 'untainted grave' (129), as has been argued.[78] Her desire to survive is apparent when, having learned privately of Massinissa's victory, she restates her 'for ever vows' to 'That honest valiant man!' (93, 95).

[78] See especially Brodwin 1971: 74-85.

Throughout the play, Marston balances true and maimed rites, civil restraint and anarchic passions. The scene takes on a studied neoclassical solemnity when an altar is furnished onstage, before which Sophonisba prays to 'Celestial powers' for a miracle (139). What follows, however, can best be described as tragic farce. Sophonisba carouses Syphax's servant, Vangue, with opiate-laced wine. He reveals that a secret passage, a vault of 'hideous darkness and much length', leads to a grove outside the city (150). Sophonisba marks how the cave-mouth 'opens so familiarly,/ Even in the king's bedchamber' (148-9). This opportune discovery is again the stuff of romance, and unsupported by anything in the sources. The phrase 'so familiarly' is unusual. Is there some sexual connotation? Caves and passages in romance naarratives are often sexually symbolic; playwrights, as we saw with the pit in *Titus* and the cave in *Dido*, were experimenting with ways of eroticising the stage space. Marston's *The Insatiate Countess* opens with the title character discovered in a vaginal 'dark hole'. There is nothing so overt here, but is there a subliminal sense in which Sophonisba escapes, miraculously, via her own body?[79] I will return to this point; more immediately we see that – like the best heroines of romance – she escapes using her wits.

A bed-trick was at the heart of *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, the first 'wedding night tragedy'. Marston's utilises the device twice in a more tragicomic, incidental and spectacular fashion, delivering what were perhaps the first *onstage* bed-tricks of the era. Sophonisba places the sleeping Vangue in bed and draws the curtains: 'There lie Syphax' bride; a naked man/ Is soon undressed' (162). Again, we see oscillations in gender identity introduced with a breach in nuptial rites. Sophonisba's tone is wry, recalling the formalities that delayed her own consummation. The sense of bedroom farce is strong as she '*descends*' through the trap just as the bridegroom arrives. Peremptorily, Syphax commands his attendants to 'stand without ear-reach/ Of the soft cries nice shrinking brides do yield', but comic suspense is raised when he pauses, telling himself to 'take thy delight by steps' (172-4). The Act 1 nuptial night is parodied as he approaches the bed in erotic anticipation, invoking Venus, Mercury and Cupid – gods of seduction rather than the marriage-gods favoured by Massinissa

[79] The notion is fanciful, but not groundless, given the possible influence of Boccaccio's *Decameron* IV.i., with its sexualised passageway used for illicit bedchamber meetings. The story was adapted for the stage in *Tancred and Gismond*, a neoclassical Inner Temple play. Such passageways appear in various plays, most notably in Suckling's 'wedding night tragedy', *Aglaura* (1637).

– and calls on the spirit of Hercules, the famed sexual athlete: 'Let not thy back be wanting' (181). But instead of '*discovering* SOPHONISBA', Syphax, '*Offering to leap into bed… discovers* VANGUE' (182sd). The latter comes to, and for a befuddled moment, both poignant and laughable, wonders, 'is my state advanced?/ O Jove, how pleasant is it but to sleep/ In a king's bed' (191-3) before he is killed by Syphax. The original union of Sophonisba and Massinissa is displaced ever further, supplanted by perverse alternatives, here a perhaps homoeroticised murder.[80] The tester-bed is once more turned into a grandiose Renaissance tomb: 'Die pleased, a king's couch is thy too-proud grave' (195).

Marston contrasts the bridegrooms not only in their treatment of Sophonisba, but also in their treatment of social inferiors: Syphax's murder of Vangue is the antithesis of Massinissa's magnanimity towards Gisco, the poor man hired to kill him: 'The god-like part of kings is to forgive' (2.2.55). Marston invents both scenes to furnish the play's 'antilogy of passion-reason'.[81] Massinissa is not simply a stolid, rational archetype, however, as various commentators have assumed. We next see him in league with the Roman general, Scipio – a political scene, yet one that has a crucial bearing on the love plot and the rites of passage theme. Massinissa and Scipio have vowed a mutual 'endless love' (2.3.90), but Marston deftly exposes the balance of power. When Scipio professes amazement at Massinissa's restraint in the face of Carthaginian treachery – 'Where is thy passion?… Statue, not man!' (3.2.21-22) – it is a *test* of the Numidean's purported Stoicism. Massinissa, his grief provoked, verges on a boyish Antonio-like collapse, but steadies himself by looking to Scipio's 'god-like' example: 'Thy face makes Massinissa more than man' (34). He then makes his fateful 'vow/ As firm as fate' to be commanded by Scipio, giving 'Of passion and of faith my heart' (35-6, 40). As in *Othello,* the homo-social pledge sounds ominously like a usurpatory marriage vow. There is even a hint of Iago in Scipio's moulding of Massinissa's passion to Roman ends, especially when he plants bedchamber pictures in his mind, counselling an attack on Cirta 'whilst Syphax snores/ With his, late thine – ' (44-5). Massinissa angrily interrupts, 'With mine?', stung by the indeterminacy of the unspoken word, *wife*. He argues that Sophonisba would sooner take her life than

[80] Senapati 2000: 136 suggests a stabbing is likely, the penetration suggestive of 'homosexual congress'.
[81] McDonald 1966: 155.

succumb to Syphax, only to face Roman cynicism over female constancy. Massinissa responds with an encomium on 'steady virtue': humans who resist worldly temptation are on a higher moral plane than otiose gods who indulge in 'never-ending pleasures' (55, 57). This anti-Epicurean stance appears to put Massinissa firmly in the Stoic camp.[82] He looks to join his wife 'Above the gods', a 'faint man' transcending human weakness (55, 62). The word 'faint' is telling, however. This is, I suggest, where Massinissa suffers the unmanly 'faintings' Scipio will later remind him of (5.4.48). His Stoic pose should be recognised as hubris. As the Romans look on, coolly sceptical, Massinissa crumbles; he deludes himself to think he can abide by their creed.

Perhaps the lack of a stage direction (in a play more detailed than most in this respect) has led many commentators to take Massinissa's self-government at face value. But as Finkelpearl correctly observes, 'Man will break out, despite philosophy' applies here too.[83] Massinissa suffers a physical collapse, not as extreme as Othello's fit, but similarly brought on by imagining his wife in bed with his rival. He is an example of what Bridget Escolme calls 'a reasoning self that seeks continually to control the somatic excesses of the passions'; Massinissa's struggle to do so is a vital part of his characterisation, since 'The man who is not passion's slave does not make a very successful dramatic hero'.[84] Once more we see instability at the threshold of manhood, as Marston prepares the ground for the tragic denouement. Having mastered Massinissa, Scipio again insinuates Sophonisba's loss of virginity: he commands a pre-dawn attack before Syphax can awake from erotic stupor and 'unwind/ His tangled sense' (3.2.72-3). This time the thought of disturbing his rival's wedding night – paying Syphax back in kind – brings Massinissa to his knees, literally embracing Scipio's iron-willed, imperial authority.[85] He allies himself to a 'god-like' *earthly* power.

The generic features of romance come to the fore in Act 4, which returns us to the wedding night escapades of Sophonisba. She and Zanthia – the latter, bribed with

[82] The classical philosophical debate flared anew in the seventeenth century. See Barbour 1998.
[83] Finkelpearl 1969: 245-7. Stoic doctrine is considered from many angles in *Sophonisba* – see also Yearling 2011.
[84] Escolme 2014: xxxi, xv.
[85] Rist 2007: 119 suggests that Scipio is won over by Massinissa but the opposite is true.

offers of sexual and monetary favour, has betrayed her mistress – emerge in a dark forest '*as out of a cave's mouth*'. As the maid pretends to search for food, Syphax enters '*Through the vault's mouth, in his nightgown, torch in hand*' (4.1.42sd). Gripping Sophonisba forcefully from behind, he again threatens rape: 'I'll thread thy richest pearl. This forest's deaf/ As is my lust' (46-7).[86] The fact that both characters are attired for bed adds to the sense of intimate danger. When Sophonisba produces a knife, vowing to kill herself if he touches her, Syphax responds with a macabre necrophilic threat:

> know, being dead, I'll use
> With highest lust of sense thy senseless flesh,
> And even then thy vexed soul shall see,
> Without resistance, thy trunk prostitute
> Unto our appetite. 4.1.57-61

As so often on the post-*Othello* stage, the audience is held in a prurient web. Syphax is a caricature libertine here, a proto-Sadeian connoisseur of depravity, though there is perhaps an unwillingness to entirely divorce Sophonisba's soul from her body. The more Syphax threatens, the more Sophonisba defies him, declaring her love for Massinissa. Marston makes her fearlessness and code of honour abundantly clear, yet the exchange that follows hints at possible reversals. Appearing to reject rape, Syphax turns conciliatory:

> Creature of most astonishing virtue,
> If with fair usage, love, and passionate courtings,
> We may obtain the heaven of thy bed,
> We cease no suit; from other force be free.
> We dote not on thy body, but love thee. 4.1.74-8

Brodwin considers this a moment of genuine wonder,[87] but an aside, 'Think, Syphax' (72), suggests otherwise. He uses the rhetoric of civil matrimonial idealism as a ploy. That Sophonisba appears to take him at his word can also be seen as strategic; she buys time, as in Act 3: 'Syphax, be recompensed, I hate thee not' (89). As Reid Barbour notes, 'the triumph of [Sophonisba's] unyielding virtue depends on some dissimulation'.[88] Marston creates a more multi-faceted 'wonder of women' than is

[86] The pearl signifies her virginity.
[87] Brodwin 1971: 76.
[88] Barbour 1998: 189.

usually acknowledged; Sophonisba is indeed modest, pious and patriotic, but she is also amorous, outspoken, astute and resourceful. She can be tough-minded too, as we see in her cool demand that Zanthia be killed over her betrayal: 'Let her not be' (86). Arguably, this is closer in spirit to Syphax's murder of Vangue than to Massinissa's forgiveness of Gisco, though it is not, I think, at odds with Marston's view of royal virtue, which might require ruthlessness. Sophonisba remains, then, a pattern of virtue, but her apparent reconciliation with Syphax keeps the playgoers – including those who know the sources – guessing about the romantic outcome.

The third wedding night scene that ensues is one of the most original pieces of staging of the era. Syphax has his bride back in his power, but does not trust to having won her over. He turns to Erictho as a supernatural procuress. The encounter bears no direct relation to anything in Livy or Appian, though Marston's interpolated witch has a classical origin in Book VI of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. This episode has attracted more comment than any other in the play, with opinion divided over its merits. As noted earlier, Wood felt that a combination of *base* farce and loathsome spectacle disfigures Marston's *grave* tragic conception, though he acknowledges its likely popular appeal.[89] Finkelpearl remarks on the incident's symbolic resonance, yet calls the language and action 'totally unrelated to anything else in the play' in artistic terms.[90] Much the harshest assessment is Robert Reed's, who deplores Marston's 'grotesque habit of embellishment' and 'unconstrained theatricality', considering Erictho 'a monster shaped and exaggerated by the distorted brain of the author' and 'a puppet twisted to satisfy the author's immediate whim'.[91] Eliot, however, defends the scene against charges of 'gratuitous horror, introduced merely to make our flesh creep',[92] and Marston's bravura staging tends to be praised by more recent critics. Martin White, for example, acclaims his brilliant utilisation of stage space and music.[93] Corbin and Sedge discuss the use of the bed and of musical effects as means of integrating theme and action, calling the episode 'central to Marston's moral scheme'.[94] And Love notes the significance of the overarching nuptial structure: 'The

[89] Wood 1939: x-xi.
[90] Finkelpearl 1969: 244.
[91] Reed 1965: 161-3.
[92] Eliot 1951: 230.
[93] White 1998: 152-4.
[94] Corbin and Sedge 1986: 12.

wedding night scene is again inverted and mirrored'.[95] I build on this notion in what follows, exploring Marston's unique staging of a marriage made in hell.

Syphax dedicates himself to the devil, or 'Infernal Jove', before summoning Erictho (4.1.93). Again, he could be seen as a caricatured Epicurean, a sacrilegious libertine who reveres sensory perception alone, calls for pleasures 'more desired than heaven', and holds that 'Blood's appetite/ Is Syphax's god' (183, 186-7). Syphax has little of Piero's goatish gloating about him, however, as he broods on his own libidinous thraldom: 'A wasting flame feeds on my amorous blood,/ Which we must cool, or die' (90-1). Marston takes a broad-brush approach to characterisation, but again subtleties appear on a closer look. Why, despite 'full opportunity' (92), does Syphax not enact his violent threats and perverse fancies, twice allowing Sophonisba to talk him round? In turning to Erictho for aid, he implicitly acknowledges his powerlessness, his inability to 'enforce love' (5.1.6). He still plots rape, but would reconfigure it as mutual fulfilment: 'Sophonisba, thy flame/ But equal mine, and we'll joy such delight,/ That gods shall not admire, but even spite' (4.1.216-18). Where Massinissa aimed to be above the gods in virtue, Syphax wants to outdo their pleasures, tasting an erotic paradise in defiance of religion: 'Let heaven be unformed with mighty charms' (184). Such strength of passion, however overweening, might draw an audience into identifying with him as an anti-hero, a *fleur du mal*, especially when set against the less dramatic 'civil fashion' of Massinissa. That said, just as we saw a hint of the sensualist beneath the latter's temperance, we might detect in the seemingly amoral Syphax an underlying need for ceremony. His fervent hopes for the wedding night are not dissimilar to those found in much nuptial verse of the era. He requests epithalamic music in Act 3, and the musical conjurations of Erictho appear to exploit a covert desire for legitimacy. The witch, in her blackly comic bed-trick, makes her bridal chamber entrance to the ethereal sound of 'nuptial hymns' (4.1.211).[96]

The Erictho scenes employ numerous musical effects, both eerie and seductive.[97] The witch's 'mighty charms' are accompanied by '*infernal music*' (184, 190sd), quite possibly played by musicians under the stage. Syphax's erotic anticipation is stoked

[95] Love 2003: 24.
[96] Cf. the maleficent use of seductive nuptial music in *The Faerie Queene* I.1.48.
[97] See Ingram 1956 on Marston's musical effects. Steggle 2000: 45 notes that Marston's use of music to comment on action is 'seen at its most developed in the almost operatic *Sophonisba*'.

when '*A treble viol and a bass lute play softly within the canopy*' (200sd); 'canopy' either refers to the bed-curtains or to a covering that hides the bed from view at this point.[98] Treble and bass instruments suggest feminine and masculine motive powers. The 'nuptial hymns' are then performed '*to soft music above*' (210sd) – on the upper stage, that is. These three tiers of music symbolise Syphax's intent, moving from diabolic urge to earthly congress to celestial fulfilment. His comment 'Now hell and heaven rings/ With music spite of Phoebus' (212-13) suggests that even Phoebus-Apollo, the temperate god of reason and harmony to whom Massinissa appeals, is powerless against Erictho's spell. Syphax believes that his wedding night will now supersede that of his rival. For him, as for Piero, it will be proof of sexual prowess, though we might wonder if the conspicuous phallic innuendo – 'make proud thy raised delight', 'Raise active Venus', 'Let all flesh bend' (179, 209, 216) – betrays a measure of masculine anxiety. Marston employs a form of continuous staging to accentuate the strange powers at work, magicking Syphax from forest to bedchamber. The witch enters '*in the shape of* SOPHONISBA*, her face veiled, and hasteth in the bed of* SYPHAX', then the king '*hasteneth within the canopy, as to* SOPHONISBA's *bed*' (213sd; 218sd). The '*as to*' formulation might suggest a liminal onstage/offstage space that functions 'more in service of concealment than revelation'.[99] Nevertheless, Marston ensures that demonic consummation feels close at hand, particularly as the sensual music continues between the acts ('*A bass lute and a treble viol play for the Act*').

By Act 5 the marriage bed is certainly on display, with Marston once more using it as a discovery space to create a theatrical coup. When Syphax '*draws the curtains and discovers* ERICTHO *lying with him*', he responds with horror, both to the cackling witch and his own culpability: 'O my abhorrèd heat! O, loathed delusion!' (5.1.3). The witchcraft episode, seen by Finkelpearl as 'a small morality play',[100] exposes the folly of unrestrained concupiscence, a message underlined by Erictho's sententious mocking: 'Know he that would force love, thus seeks his hell' (5.1.20-1). Poetic justice is served, with one evil trumping another: the lustful tyrant becomes erotic victim, the libertine learns that love has its laws, the rapist is, in effect, raped. Syphax

[98] See Dessen and Thomson 1999: 41 and Love 2003: 23-5, especially n63.
[99] Love 2003: 24.
[100] Finkelpearl 1969: 244.

wakes as a laughing stock, an abject gull, having, in a sense, *married* Erictho. The point is underscored in visual terms, with his post-coital 'discovery' of her an inverse of Massinissa's 'discovery' of the virginal Sophonisba. Another visual echo occurs when Syphax kneels before an 'altar sacred to black powers' (27), probably the shrine at which Sophonisba prayed to 'celestial powers'. Such reversals are part of an elaborate symbolic pattern. But is Erictho herself anything more than a gratuitous classical fiend served up to a thrill-seeking educated audience? And does the interlude add up to anything more than a 'small morality play'?

As I suggested in my introduction, wedding night scenarios serve as crucibles for the testing of desire. In the finest of them, such as *Othello* and *The Changeling*, characters undergo profound transformations, with natures destroyed or re-wrought in the tragic heat. At first glance, *Sophonisba* appears to fall short in this regard, despite the immediacy Marston brings to the genre, with three extended bedchamber scenes. The main figures of virtue or vice seem, in essence, little changed by their experiences. For all his humiliation, Syphax departs the stage in Act 5.1 bent on war and vengeance much as he did in Act 1.1. A change *has* been effected, though. Finkelpearl puts it thus: 'Through his contact with Erictho, Syphax becomes a gigantically magnified and distorted symbol of the overpowering, destructive evil of this world, because of which the purely good cannot survive'.[101] This could almost be a description of Milton's Satan, an impression strengthened if we consider Syphax's entreaty to 'You resolute angels that delight in flames' (4.1.94). Marston's over-reaching tyrant bids for god-like fulfilment – 'Jove we'll not envy thee' (186) – but is cast into a hell of sexual shame. After his fall, he is at once a figure of despair and courageous defiance, who 'curse[s]/ His very being' yet dares the Olympian gods to heap further punishment on his head (5.1.25-38). As with Satan, Syphax's refusal to be cowed complicates our response to his megalomaniac cruelty. Ignoring the didactic warning of Asdrubal's ghost – 'Mortals, O fear to slight/ Your gods and vows' (61-2) – Syphax rises, energised, sustained by his atheistic resistance to the very idea of omnipotent rule. Massinissa and Scipio await, but the supernatural action and cosmic iconography bring a Manichean sense to the conflict, beyond the immediate love

[101] Finkelpearl 1969: 244.

rivalry and imperial struggle. To overturn Wood's objection, *grave* matter stems from the *base* bedroom farce of the witchcraft scenes.

Erictho demands our attention too, since these are her infernal nuptial rites. The other characters in the romantic plot face delay and displacement, but the witch's mock-wedding is consummated to her own satisfaction. Whilst much of the gruesome detail derives from Lucan, Marston heightens the carnal element, drawing on (largely Continental) Renaissance notions of 'a succubus, a devil in female form, who seduces and betrays men'.[102] As a character, Erictho has far more at stake than most stage witches of the era. She seeks a king's 'proud heat' as an elixir to make her 'limbs grow young'; her 'thirsty womb' has 'coveted full threescore suns for blood of kings' (5.1. 8-9, 19-20). Impregnation is implied here, a fitting irony given the nuptial 'fruition' sought by Syphax (4.1.209).[103] Unhallowed sexuality suffuses the description of Erictho's cell (143-67). She dwells in a desecrated temple, where harsh calls of carrion birds replace 'sweet hymns to heaven', where 'the shepherd now/ Unloads his belly' amongst 'tombs and beauteous urns', and where pornographic graffiti replaces classical erotica:

> Where statues and Jove's acts were vively limned
> Boys with black coals draw the veiled parts of nature,
> And lecherous actions of imagined lust 4.1.153-5.

The setting is Libya but 'the wealth of concrete detail here draws on Marston's own experience of England's ruined monastic churches'.[104] Henry VIII comes to mind in the line 'Hurled down by the wrath and lust of impious kings' (148). Given that sacred ruins were sometimes associated with fertility rituals – Alexandra Walsham surmises that young people resorted to them in the hope of 'discovering the secrets of love and marriage by occult means'[105] – these contemporary resonances might support the notion of demoniac conception. Erictho's cell is both tomb and womb:

> There was once a charnel-house, now a vast cave,
> Over whose brow a pale and untrod grove
> Throws out her heavy shade, the mouth thick arms

[102] Corbin and Sedge 1986: 6. The introduction of supernatural figures is firmly in the neoclassical tradition, though Marston gives Erictho unusual prominence.
[103] Geckle 1980: 186 reads the scene in this way.
[104] Jackson and Neill, note to 143ff. Cf. 'I ha' seen oxen plough up altars', *The Malcontent* 2.5.135.
[105] Walsham 2012: 71.

Of darksome yew, sun-proof, for ever choke;
Within rests barren darkness; fruitless drought
Pines in eternal night; the steam of hell
Yields not so lazy air: there, that's my cell 4.1.161-7.

Tree-fringed caves, pits or bowers have vaginal connotations in other works of the era, notably Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.[106] The latter's 'fruitfull' Mount of Venus, a fecund 'pleasant arbour' (III.vi.43-44), is the antithesis of Erictho's 'fruitless' womb. 'Untrod grove' might denote the witch a virgin.[107] Does her perversity stem from lifelong frustration? Retained seed or menses were thought to produce noxious vapours – hence the cave's smothering, torpid air.[108] Only the potency of an 'impious king', it seems, can reanimate this crypt. Erictho's triumphant descent, as she '*slips into the ground*' via the trap, is not so much to hell as to her own newly fertile cell.

Recent critics have defended the witchcraft scenes as an integral part of the play on thematic grounds. Corbin and Sedge contend that 'Sophonisba's essential opponent in the play is Erictho';[109] the pair are in dialectical opposition as sexual beings, with Marston setting sordid ungovernable appetite against noble control of the passions. If Sophonisba is a temple of civic virtue, 'Carthage'[s] Palladium', Erictho's cell offers a powerful image of civic collapse: the temple fallen, the gods neglected or challenged, the land open to invasion, saintly intercession replaced with diabolism, healthy concupiscence turned to disease and profanity. Sophonisba is associated with the sun's 'lifeful presence', dispersing 'fancies, fogs, fears', whereas 'the king of flames grows pale' at the fumes raised by Erictho (1.2.233-4; 4.1.135-6). The sorceress engages in an elemental struggle, earth against sky. She is the 'mother of all high/ Mysterious science' (4.1.139-40), challenging Apollonian reason with her dark arts. Again, a sense of cosmic scale attends the mock-wedding of Syphax and Erictho. Marston offers a contest of extravagant sexual personae, in which chthonian female magic subverts masculine will-to-power.[110] Erictho manages her own fertility treatment, whilst accomplishing a female revenge on male tyranny. Put this way, the moral binaries start to look less straightforward. Witches were believed to 'disrupt the

[106] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.vi.43-44.
[107] In human terms – though her coupling with demonic 'labouring spirits' (4.1.193) is implied.
[108] Early modern medical opinion held that the womb dictated female health; see Kassell 2013: 66-9.
[109] Corbin and Sedge 1986: 12. See also Rist 2007.
[110] See Paglia 1991: Chap. 1. Paglia turns sex in general into a B-movie horror-show but her ideas are highly relevant to the Erictho episode.

course of benign sexual relationships and fruitful reproduction',[111] but Erictho, in her quest for fruition, disrupts a potential rape. A histrionic horror, feeding salaciously on corpses, she nevertheless drives home the same point as Sophonisba about 'he that would force love'. Here it seems that *vice* perforce is *virtue*. Should we view Sophonisba and Erictho as opposites, or is there a psychic affinity between them, though they never meet? In Livy, the defeated Syphax blames a sexually powerful and politically engaged Sophonisba for his downfall, castigating 'that fiend of hell, and lime of the devil', the 'pestilent dame, that by all kind of pleasant alluring baits, and flattering enticements possessed my mind'.[112] The historian, whilst acknowledging Syphax's malice, himself presents the queen as a manipulative charmer. This aspect is largely ignored or suppressed by Renaissance dramatists, who turn Sophonisba into a chaste 'wonder'. Marston is no exception, but in his readiness to 'enlarge everything as a poet', he allows the split-off illicit eroticism to re-enter the story in monstrous form.

In a brief note on the play, Marta Straznicky calls the sorceress a 'dark double' to Sophonisba.[113] The proto-Gothic aspects of the Erichto scenes invite psychoanalytical readings. Both 'brides' are 'discovered' in the bridal bed, one pre-, one post-consummation; both dissemble in order to play bed-tricks on Syphax, one to elude, one to ensnare him; and the escapes of both can be read, symbolically, as via their own bodies, if we allow the trap as part of Marston's gynocentric design. Does Erictho enact Sophonisba's revenge on the lustful tyrant? Or is she a carnal alter ego, enjoying the wedding night of the heroine's taboo romantic fantasy? Such notions risk denying Erictho her own agency, or making Sophonisba's love for Massinissa less than passionate, when the denouement depends, in my view, on genuine strength of feeling between the pair. But Marston's decision to incorporate Erictho is a teasing one. Romance heroines, caught in the liminal space between vow and consummation, often pass through a spectrum of alternative roles or identities. I have suggested that this is to do with uncertainty at the threshold to married life. Perhaps there is a sense of such instability even in Sophonisba, the idealised bride, which is somehow played out in the Erictho episode. Reed suggests that the witch is a product of Marston's

[111] Broedel 2003: 26.
[112] Livy, *Romane Historie*, trans. Philemon Holland (1600), quoted in Geckle, p.183.
[113] Straznicky 1994: 121n49.

'distorted brain'. If that is so, the distortion is a creative one. Unlike Reed, I welcome Erictho's outré appearance as a ghoulish shadow-bride, the stuff of conjugal nightmare for playgoing gallants.[114] Marston's poetic and dramaturgical instincts told him that in an age of matrimonial aspiration – the play is contemporaneous with *Hymenaei* – Erictho's cell, haunted by English religious and sexual shame, was still part of the psychic landscape.

Masculine rites of passage are foregrounded in the battle scene that follows. Massinissa calls on his (one-sided) bond of 'eternal love' with Scipio, pleading to lead the war against Syphax (5.2.3). When the rivals meet in single combat, Marston underlines the conflict's dialectical significance. Each had looked to outdo the gods, in the name of either virtue or pleasure; here, Massinissa seeks divine aid to be god-like in battle, striking 'Fire worth Jove', whilst Syphax sticks defiantly to an egoistic atheism: 'My god's my arm, my life my heaven' (15, 40). Both ringingly declare themselves Sophonisba's champion. Massinissa, exhorted earlier to 'vent… youthful heat/ In fields, not beds', steels himself in phallic terms: 'Stand blood!' (1.2.216-7; 5.2.30). The sense of erotic displacement is felt in his first breathless question after victory: 'Lives Sophonisba yet unstained – speak just – / Yet ours unforced?' (45-6). That Syphax, his life riding on the answer, can truthfully vouch for her virginity is thanks, ironically, to Erictho. Massinissa shows magnanimity once more, sparing Syphax before swiftly departing to reclaim his bride: 'In honour and in love all mean is sin' (54). The axiom sounds incontrovertible, but Marston exposes its political naivety. Massinissa was required to put honour before love on his wedding night, yet still does not realise an equal devotion to both is not always possible. His understandable haste leaves Syphax (more cunning now) to work his spite, even with Scipio's foot pressed to his neck. As in Livy, the king presents Sophonisba to the Romans as a dangerous patriot who swayed him to the Carthaginian cause with her wanton charms.[115] He dates her malign influence to their nuptials: 'Her hymeneal torch burnt down my house' (79).[116] Syphax implies that Massinissa will likewise break with Rome for his wife's sake, a slander that carries more force in Marston's

[114] Cf. Marston's comic litany of ghoulish potential wives in *The Fawn* 4.290-301.
[115] Scipio already has his own reasons for wanting Sophonisba for his triumph, his father having been killed by Asdrubal. Marston keeps back this information until 5.3.50.
[116] The line derives from Livy, where Syphax and Sophonisba are in an established marriage. The action is drastically foreshortened in the play.

adaptation since the purported *femme fatale* – a 'woman of so moving art' as Scipio imagines her (91) – remains a virgin bride.

Should Sophonisba be in bridal dress as she attempts to escape a besieged Cirta? No costume is specified but the use of torch-bearing pages and train-bearing women echoes the prologue, where nuptial and martial emblems were first juxtaposed. Encountering a Libyan soldier with his visor down, she implores him to preserve her freedom or, failing that, to ensure her 'unshamed death' (5.3.27). Massinissa reveals himself with another fateful promise: 'By thee and this right hand thou shalt live free' (29). Suddenly the lovers are alone together on stage for the first time. A brief romantic spell is cast with rhyme and '*Soft music*', the latter a heavenly counterbalance to Erictho's infernal soundtrack. The lovers have been supposed indifferent or even averse to sex, but the groom's nuptial anticipation is clear: 'Let slaughter cease; sounds soft as Leda's breast/ Slide through all ears. This night be love's high feast' (31-2).

What of Sophonisba though? Is it the case that she fears excessive pleasure, since 'the physical consummation of her marriage would dissipate the power of her lust for spiritual glory', or that, in a Marian decision to forego carnality, she 'sublimates her sexuality to an ideal of female constancy'?[117] Consider her response to Massinissa:

SOPHONISBA O'erwhelm me not with sweets; let me not drink
Till my breast burst, O Jove, thy nectar, think –
She sinks into MASSINISSA*'s arms.*
MASSINISSA She is o'ercome with joy.
SOPHONISBA Help – help to bear
Some happiness, ye powers! I have joy to spare,
Enough to make a god. O Massinissa! 5.1.33-37.

There is trepidation here, to be sure; like Shakespeare's Troilus, and Othello too perhaps,[118] Sophonisba doubts her physical ability to cope with rapture. Far from renouncing desire, however, she embraces it with a 'god-like' aspiration. Her conflation of man and god (Massinissa as Jove) is telling, conveyed through a series of orgasmic 'O's: 'O'erwhelm', 'O Jove', 'o'ercome', 'O Massinissa!'. Her husband

[117] Brodwin 1971: 79; Rist 2007: 114.
[118] *Troilus and Cressida* 3.2.18-29; *Othello* 2.1.187-195.

simultaneously causes her to swoon and stops her from falling. He offers an erotic promise she finds too much to bear, *and* the celestial support that allows her to handle the surge of delight. She will 'make a god' – become a god herself, or fashion her husband as one, or perhaps conceive a god through their hierogamous union. For Sophonisba, this is a consummation devoutly to be wished, the companionate apotheosis, divine sensual fulfilment within a civil framework.

There is a desire for spiritual glory here, but it is to be achieved through physical congress. The 'delayed consummation' structure is seemingly fulfilled. Kate Cooper, writing on Hellenic romance, discusses the figure of 'the desired and desiring bride' who, sundered from her lover, suffers a 'long-deferred wedding night', overcoming sexual misadventures to be reunited with her bridegroom; it is a process of 'dislocation and renewal' that replenishes the social order.[119] This is precisely the narrative design of Marston's play – until the moment of renewal itself, which is simultaneously the moment of hubris. Massinissa's call for 'sounds soft as Leda's breast' strikes an uneasy note, if we pause to consider Jove's sexual violence. Syphax looked to be god-like too when it came to pleasure. Massinissa, in his moment of triumph, is similarly deluded. He falls for his own kingly publicity – as does his enraptured wife. Like Desdemona on her bridal day, Sophonisba is about to find that 'men are not gods'; this fact is abruptly exposed as the political world to which the lovers are answerable intrudes on their nuptial embrace.

Having created a new narrative framework, Marston returns to his sources for the famous love-versus-honour crisis. Reminded of his 'vow of faith' to an implacable Scipio (40), Massinissa is called upon to deliver up his wife. He goes to pieces, caught between vows – though the male bond ultimately holds greater sway. Told to 'make fit thyself for bondage' (78), Sophonisba makes instead her renowned decision to commit suicide. Her sacrifice resolves her husband's double-bind, allowing him to give her to the Romans *and* to keep her from slavery. In the sources, the latter is her primary concern, but Marston places equal, if not greater, weight on saving her husband from dishonour. Her will, she tells him, is 'To keep thy faith upright', 'To save you – you' (84, 97). She expresses a momentary bridal regret – 'How like was I

[119] Cooper 1996: 27-28, 35.

yet once to have been glad!' – but shows unhesitating fortitude in ending an 'abhorred life' (90, 100). Her death scene is remarkably swift, with none of the protracted pathos found in Trissino's version. Massinissa supplies the poison for his sacrificial bride:

> *She drinks.*
> You have been good to me,
> And I do thank thee, heaven. O my stars,
> I bless your goodness, that with breast unstained,
> Faith pure, a virgin wife, tried to my glory,
> I die, of female faith the long-lived story;
> Secure from bondage and all servile harms,
> But more – most happy in my husband's arms.
> *She sinks.* 5.3.100-106

Sophonisba addresses Massinissa first. The simplicity of 'You have been good to me' is as affecting as it is questionable:[120] did he not promise that she would '*live* free' (29, my italics)? The same could be said of her attempt to reframe her trials as heavenly blessings. She has been betrayed by her city, her father, her maid, denied the husband of her choice, threatened with rape and enslavement. In their dealings with Rome, her two potential husbands, one benign, one malign, create the conditions for her marriage-to-death. Given the prevailing evil, Finkelpearl contends that there is nothing to lament in her serene end: 'It is not tragedy, but a positive and triumphant act to leave such a world'.[121] Sophonisba has lost her sustaining hope: she placed faith in Massinissa, only to find their 'for ever vows' trumped. Her 'well-famed death' takes the form of a sublimated consummation in his arms, one that preserves her as a 'virgin wife'. Here there is indeed a Mariological aspect to the heroine's intercession,[122] making her an icon deserving adoration, a 'glory ripe for heaven' (113). Transcendence should not, however, blind us to tragedy.

From the moment their nuptials are abandoned in Act 1, the lovers (to adapt Seamus Heaney) lose more of themselves than they redeem in doing the decent thing.[123] Massinissa's 'Virtue perforce is vice' is perhaps the essence of his *particular* tragedy. He was a problematic figure for dramatists, outliving his wife in such unheroic

[120] Some consider Sophonisba's final lines the play's best, or *only*, poetry eg. Ellis-Fermor 1965: 89.
[121] Finkelpearl 1969: 244.
[122] See Finkelpearl 1969: 239 and Rist 2007: 111-12.
[123] See 'Station Island', section XII.

fashion. One solution was to have him follow her example and join her in a mutual *liebestod*.[124] Marston, however, tackles his shame head-on. His Massinissa has been deemed Sophonisba's 'moral inferior', a man 'unworthy of her pure sacrifice'.[125] He does indeed seem utterly craven, furnishing her with poison even as he exclaims 'thou darest not die!' (88). Yet Marston had earlier emphasised his 'civil fashion', showing him as loving, principled and magnanimous (more so than Sophonisba on the last count). He is heroic too, defeating his rival to rescue his wife. But where Syphax falls, farcically, into sexual shame, Massinissa suffers a tragic fall on moral grounds, undone, to an extent, by his own idealism. Like Shakespeare, Marston 'interrogates the binaries of reason and passion'.[126] Ironically, Massinissa's shame is forced home by the wife who looks to save him from dishonour. Massinissa is summarily reduced from a figure of prowess and virtue to an abject vassal, weeping and effeminate. He has proved his manhood on the battlefield, but he is politically outmanoevred and sexually subverted. For all the tenderness of Sophonisba's tone – 'Dear, do not weep' – we might hear an implied reproach as she reminds him of, and indeed steps into, the traditional masculine role: 'Behold me, Massinissa, like thyself/ A king and soldier' (93-5). His praise as she dies in his arms – 'Covetous,/ Fame-greedy lady' (107-8) – is double-edged, conscious of his own comparative ignominy. Sophonisba's insistence on the male bond's primacy brings a large reward when Massinissa ceremonially delivers her body to the Romans. Scipio lauds his virtue and (before a chained-up and envious Syphax) crowns him king of Numidea. His abject status as 'Rome's very minion' is, however, made all too clear (5.4.47). Massinissa's final act is to adorn Sophonisba, transferring his honours to 'Women's right wonder, and just shame of men' (59). Dressed in black, he stands as an emblem of collective male guilt, his worldly power a spiritual stain.

This is a restrained tragic denouement: no bodies are savagely mutilated, no *danse macabre* leaves the stage strewn with corpses. But Marston's final tableau has an affective power, offering the spousal pair as figures of death-in-life and life-in-death. Sophonisba has earned a 'deathless fame' (5.4.53), even if her story never achieved the prominence in Renaissance England that it did on the continent. Chaste bridal

[124] Eg. in versions by Jean Mairet and Nathaniel Lee.
[125] Finkelpearl 1969: 245; Brodwin 1971: 82.
[126] Escolme 2014: 198.

martyrs were about to emerge as a major type on the London stage, as I discuss in Chapter 6. Such patterns of virtue, often presented in arch or cloying fashion, rarely appeal to sceptical modern tastes. Marston animates his icon, however. His Sophonisba may not display the overt sexual and political drive of Livy's queen, but she is nuanced and credible in both her public and private dealings. Her turbulent nuptials are played out on an epic canvas, yet Marston creates a sense of intimacy, foregrounding the bridal chamber on the Blackfriars stage. The blend of solemnity and farce is (in these scenes at least) more Shakespearean than Senecal, to reverse Eliot's assessment. Eliot was right, however, to sense 'poetic genius' at work in the play, to detect a 'double reality', a 'pattern behind the pattern'.[127] This is less a matter of Marston's somewhat stiff-jointed verse, than the 'accumulation of a series of juxtaposed stage images and semiotic set pieces'.[128] Through a command of structure and symbol, of parallels and polarities both visual and aural, Marston succeeds in 'enlarg[ing] everything as a poet'. There is indeed a double pattern to his 'tragic wedding' design, embracing the *hieros gamos* (in its Renaissance manifestation) even as consummation is denied in this life. *Sophonisba* is not a forbidding monolith, or a neoclassical temple from which the gods have fled. It is high time that the play – a work, I venture, of *theatrical* genius – was staged anew.

[127] Eliot 1951: 230-2.
[128] Scott 2000: 225.

CHAPTER 5

Libertines and *Liebestods*: The Jacobean Fatal Marriage

'But sure it is no custom for the Groom/ To leave his bride upon the Nuptial day' (2.1.27-8) declares an abandoned bride, Annabel, in *A Wedding, or a Cure for a Cuckold* (1624), a tragicomedy by Thomas Heywood, John Webster and William Rowley. The bridegroom, Bonvile, has been called away on his wedding night to second his friend in a duel; he puts manly duty first (like Othello and Massinissa), only to find *himself* subject to the challenge at the appointed time: 'You left your Bridal-bed to finde your Death-bed' (3.1.45). This is a new twist on displaced nuptial rites, one that threatens to leave his 'Bride a Widow, – her soft bed/ No witness of those joys this night expects' (1.2.158-9). Even the bed takes a prurient interest in these affairs. The bride's wide-eyed bewilderment at the groom's absence is underscored by irony; such estrangement was, as regular playgoers would have known, something of a theatrical norm. The 'delayed consummation' as a structural device is itself highlighted when Annabel, seeking her husband, is accosted by Rochfield, a would-be gentleman thief:

ROCHFIELD Be you Wife or Virgin.
ANNABEL I am both, Sir.
ROCHFIELD This then it seems should be your Wedding-day,
And these the hours of interim to keep you
In that double state. Come then, Ile be brief,
For Ile not hinder your desired *Hymen* 2.2.16-20.

Since Annabel's costume does not seem to automatically identify her as a bride, Rochfield appears metatheatrically well-versed in stage conventions; phrases such as 'the hours of interim' and 'that double state' identify the ingredients of many nuptial designs, as devised by playwrights – working individually or, as here, in collaboration – seeking new ways to hinder Hymen.

Moments such as these show how deeply embedded in the theatrical consciousness a 'tragic wedding' theatregram had become by the end of the Jacobean period – though here the conventions are put to tragicomic use since, despite troubles stirred up by romantic rivals, a tragic outcome is happily avoided. My intention in this chapter is to illustrate the full establishment of the theatregram in the early seventeenth century, in support of my claim that it became one of the foremost components in the theatrical toolkit. I pay particular attention to aspects of staging, drawing out the ways in which 'tragic wedding' designs lie behind a number of the era's most complex and striking scenes. I continue to address the cultural discourses that find expression in nuptial tragedy, with one section of the chapter devoted to a cluster of plays produced c.1610 that deal with a perceived libertine threat to marriage. A second section concerns a group of plays from a decade or so later that take radically different approaches to the love-death, or *liebestod*, in stories of wedding-night murder or martyrdom. First, though, in order to convey something of the prevalence and adaptability of the 'tragic wedding' theatregram, I briefly consider a few scenes from the canon of Thomas Heywood, the most prolific playwright of the era.

Heywood helped to shape, and drew eclectically upon, a wide range of theatrical conventions and genres. None of his extant plays could be considered a 'wedding night tragedy' as such, but a number employ associated plots and motifs. His list of theatrical roles in 'The Author to His Booke', prefixed to *An Apology for Actors* (1612), identifies some that belong to the 'tragic wedding' convention: 'This covets marriage love, that nuptial strife,/ Both in continual action spend their dayes' (15-16). Heywood is probably responsible for Rochfield's knowing allusion to the 'delayed consummation' design in *A Wedding, or a Cure for a Cuckold*, demonstrating his reflexive awareness of the theatregram. The wedding night situations, some brief, some extended, in his surviving plays are largely in tragicomic vein. An episode in *The Royal King, and the Loyal Subject* (c.1602) – a play that is part romance, part political parable – sees the hero hauled from his bridal chamber, arraigned, and sentenced to death, only for a bathetic change of heart on his King's part: 'Our funerals thus/ Wee'le turn to feasting' (Vol. VI, 83). The reverse idea is voiced in *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634), a witchcraft play written with Richard Brome: 'If not a Wedding we will make a Wake on't' (Vol. IV, 211). When the marriage of Lawrence and Parnell is cursed by the groom's former sweetheart, the normally

'lusty' Lawrence is unmanned, much to his bride's displeasure: 'The quarell began they say upon the wedding night, and in the bride bed' (231-2). A spectacular skimmington is staged to mock the harried groom. Heywood's romantic adventure, *The Fair Maid of the West Pt. 2* (c.1630), has an extended *droit du seigneur* design in which a double bed-trick is comically used to prevent the King and Queen of Fesse from sleeping with (respectively) the seafaring heroine, Bess Bridges, and her bridegroom, Spencer, on their wedding night. The 'delayed consummation' scenario leads Spencer to face a death sentence, and Bess to vow a suitably nautical nuptial martyrdom: 'But if thou dost miscary, think the Ocean/ To be my Bride-bed' (Vol.II, 364).

These plays in a range of genres all offer variations on the 'stealing joy' principle, with the bridal chamber a site of rivalry or revenge. All are resolved happily, but we can see the extent to which the tragic potential of the wedding night preoccupies the theatrical imagination in this period. Heywood's domestic tragedy, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603) is not, as a tale of ongoing adultery, centred upon the wedding night, yet it makes use of a nuptial framework. The Frankford's marriage is certainly consummated: a post-nuptial soliloquy sees Frankford basking in prosperous satisfaction, with 'a fair, a chaste, and loving wife' the jewel in his crown (iv. 11). The mood of contentment suggests an unperturbed wedding night; there is no evidence of disturbance, nothing that seems to warrant Anne 'staggering downstairs in a blood-stained nightgown', an interpolation in Katie Mitchell's 2011 National Theatre production.[1] We never see the Frankfords alone together but their love seems a given: the cuckolder, Wendoll, later regrets 'divorc[ing] the truest turtles/ That ever lived together' (xvi.48-9) – a paradoxical statement given Anne's complicity. The nuptial night is, though, the focus of the play's opening lines. When the ballad 'The Shaking of the Sheets' is bawdily called for at the wedding – 'that's the dance her husband means to lead her' (i.3) – it is mordantly pointed out by Wendoll that the dance of death trumps that of sex in the lyric. When Frankford invites Wendoll to share his home on the day after the wedding, to live 'joined and knit together' (vi.50), the language is akin to that of a marital union.[2] Frankford's error is underlined by the stablehand, Nick's, privately-voiced aversion to Wendoll: 'The devil and he are all

[1] Dolan 2012: xxx – the idea being to provide an adequate motivation for adultery.
[2] Rudnytsky 1983: 120-1 sees parallels with the pseudo-marriage of Othello and Iago.

one in my eye' (88). Heywood dramatises an archetypal incursion, not prior to consummation, but with the marriage still in its vulnerable formative hours. Anne, a bourgeois Eve, is powerless against Wendoll's seductive charms: as Nick observes, 'that Satan hath corrupted her' (vi.178).[3] The finale brings tragic wedding iconography to the fore:

> FRANKFORD And with this kiss I wed thee once again…
> ANNE Pardoned on earth, soul, thou in heaven art free.
> Once more thy wife dies thus embracing thee.
> FRANKFORD New married, and new widowed; O she's dead,
> And a cold grave must be our nuptial bed. xvii.117-24

The staging draws on the intimate mode pioneered by Shakespeare and Marston, conflating bride-bed and death-bed by visual as well as verbal means. Again it seems likely that a tester-bed resembling a 'marble tomb' (138) was used. Anne is marmorealised, her penitential end witnessed by a group that includes most of the original nuptial celebrants, completing the narrative circle. The inclusion of involved spectators who 'make very clear their own intense participation' is a notable means of encouraging active empathy in Renaissance art.[4] All of the onlookers (bar Nick) express a wish to 'die' with Anne. There is no diabolical parody of the sexual act as in *Othello*, yet the collective suspiration (which draws in the playhouse audience) is strangely eroticised through Anne's last words. She becomes a wife again, reliving the connubial *petit mort*, in syzygetic correspondence perhaps with her first experience as a bride. Heywood puts the evolving conventions to complex use, animating wedding-as-funeral, death-as-consummation tropes for a scene of affective power.[5]

A strong sense of the theatregram's prevalence is found in Heywood's sequence of *Age* plays – *Golden*, *Silver*, *Brazen* and *Iron*.[6] These works are of particular interest in terms of staging nuptial tragedy, given the importance of classical motifs in the formation of the theatregram. Each of the pyrotechnic extravaganzas contains at least one 'broken nuptial' scenario. Saturn attempts to murder his son Jupiter at his wedding to Juno (*Golden*); the famous wedding-banquet battle of the Lapiths and

[3] See Henderson 1986: 278 on the play as a 'sacred fable' of fall 'from Edenic bliss into sin'.
[4] Fowler 2003: 76.
[5] See Dolan 2012 on the stage history.
[6] The first three are thought to date c.1611, the last (divided into two parts) from some years later. The plays were hugely popular – see Boas 1950: 83-4.

Centaurs is riotously enacted (*Silver*); and for the story of Meleager (*Brazen*), Heywood adapts his Ovidian source by making a wedding feast the occasion of a sensational torture by his vengeful mother, Althea: 'oh how this festive joy/ Stirs up my fury to revenge and death' (Vol. III, 199). She uses the legendary brand that magically preserves Meleager's life as a wedding torch to consume it – a highly theatrical innovation. The most intriguing appearance of the theatregram comes in the final two acts of *The Iron Age Pt. 2*, which deal with the return from Troy. This astonishingly condensed *Oresteia* weaves plots derived from numerous sources into a miniature Renaissance revenge tragedy, complete with an over-reaching machiavel, an accusatory ghost, and a 'fatal marriage' ceremony with one of the highest body counts of the era. The slaughter is disingenuously justified in the epilogue – 'tis the Story,/ Truth claimes excuse' – but no source, to my knowledge, has Orestes and Pyrrhus as rival bridegrooms killing each other at the altar (even if their contractual dispute over Hermione is faithfully rendered).

A panoply of 'tragic wedding' motifs is utilised, as Heywood, with artful circularity, repackages Greek myth in a distinctly English mimetic mode. A striking example comes with the death of Agamemnon. In Aeschylus's dramatisation, he is killed in a bath, in Seneca's, at a banquet; in both cases the violence occurs offstage. Heywood brings it onstage, into the bedchamber. The reunion of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra is portrayed as a remarriage. Clytemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus, are spurred to murder by the machiavellian Cethus, who fixes (Iago-like) on the marriage bed as the site of revenge, determining to 'make the Downe they lie on quaffe their blood' (398).[7] The king and queen are accompanied into the bedroom by loud music and cheering followers as 'At a new bridall' (411).[8] Aegisthus awaits, sword drawn, having hidden '*behind the Bed-curtaines*'. Agamemnon, sensing something amiss, peers suspiciously about the chamber. The conscious irony of Clytemnestra's 'are wee not alone?/ Or will you to the private sweetes of night,/ Call tell tale witnesse?' (412) not only raises suspense with regard to Aegisthus, but also plays on the sense of audience voyeurism. Playgoers are made tell-tale witnesses, party to privacy, held

[7] Cethus, the malcontent, seeks revenge for the murder of his falsely accused brother, Palamides.
[8] Wedding parties accompanied bride and groom into the chamber in ancient world, as they did in early modern England.

within a prurient suture. Agamemnon banishes his fears, but they return as he lies on the bed where Aegisthus lurks:

> How hard this Doune feeles, like a monument
> Cut out of marble. Beds resemble Graves,
> And these me-thinkes appeare like winding sheetes
> Prepar'd for corses. Vol. III p. 412.

Again, this owes much to Shakespeare and Marston in semiotic terms: beds as tombs, living occupants as sculpture, wedding- as winding-sheets. Agamemnon dismisses his anxiety again, notes his phallic arousal ('I now am arm'd for pleasure'), and asks with a perturbed instinct after Aegisthus – only to be answered with murder, jointly stabbed by his wife and her lover as a '*greate thunder crack*' sounds divine disapproval. This death at a moment of erotic anticipation has parallels with the tragicomic bedchamber scenes in *Sophonisba* and (as we shall see in the next chapter) *The Maid's Tragedy*. Here the bed is not withdrawn but solemnly shouldered off, continuing the association of bed and tomb: 'This is a blacke and mourning funerall right' (414).

The *Ages* plays are episodic and sensational, though not without structure;[9] the compulsive dash through multiple foreshortened myths weighs against genuine tragic effect, whether of the English or Greek variety. That said, Heywood's self-conscious handling of dramatic conventions, each carrying trace-memories of earlier usage, is bold and dexterous. The tragic wedding theatregram emerges as one of the key elements at his disposal – testament to its established place in the professional repertory. At one point, Sinon, another arch-villain in *The Iron Age Pt. 2*., is asked why his head aches; he replies 'there's a wedding breeding in my braine' (425). With its sinister participle and packed consonance, the line captures the diabolical fertility of the enemies to marriage on the Renaissance stage; it also shadows forth the artist, the cunning of the dramatist with a 'tragic wedding' plot in mind. For Heywood and his fellow professional dramatists, the hindering of Hymen was a major preoccupation.

[9] See McLuskie 1994: 15-22.

‘’TWIXT AMOROUS AND VILLAINOUS’: LIBERTINE THREATS TO THE BRIDAL CHAMBER IN *THE INSATIATE COUNTESS*, *CYMBELINE* AND *THE ATHEIST’S TRAGEDY*

The three plays I consider in this section are all usually dated circa 1610. They are at once recapitulatory and innovative in their treatment of the ‘broken nuptials’ theme. Artifice is foregrounded in works of significant genre instability. I group the three together because they all deal with libertinism as a perceived threat to chaste marriage – a threat that subverts the wedding night itself, or creates disturbance in the ‘hours of interim’ between vow and consummation. Established heroic codes and moral certainties (or rigidities) are tested by slippery or malignant varieties of scepticism. Plays such as *Titus Andronicus* had earlier highlighted similar concerns, but a libertinism to be reckoned with in ideological as well as behavioural terms comes to the fore in the Jacobean era.[10] I have already noted that Marston was key in bringing an often conflicted discourse on sexual freedom to the public stage, in plays such as *The Dutch Courtesan* and *The Fawn*. Other playwrights followed suit, particularly those writing for a core audience of gentlemen-gallants at the indoor theatres, where comedy became increasingly provocative and there was a ‘movement toward generically flexible, sexualised tragedy’.[11] The discourse is found in all repertories. Shakespeare depicts a number of disillusioned or reformed rakes, such as Jaques in *As You Like It*, Lysimachus in *Pericles*, and, as we shall see, Jachimo in *Cymbeline*. An anti-libertine stance seems clear in these instances – but what are we to make of *Antony and Cleopatra*? The disastrous Battle of Actium shows how far the great Roman general has fallen as a debauched ‘libertine’ in ‘epicurean’ thraldom to Cleopatra (2.1.23-4). Yet the lovers’ adulterous passion leads to an envisioned marriage-in-death, with Octavius Caesar proposing to bury the pair together – an acknowledgement that their illicit union was more legitimate than Antony’s failed dynastic marriage to his Roman wife, Octavia. Libidinous passion is accorded a near-hierogamous apotheosis. Each of the three ‘broken nuptial’ plays I address in this section ends on a more doctrinal note when it comes to sexual and marital ideology –

[10] See Turner 2003: Introduction.
[11] Munro 2005: 154. See also Bly 2000 on the highly eroticised Whitefriars repertory.

pro-marriage, anti-libertine – but not before opposing stances have been aired and, on occasion, suggestively enacted.

The Insatiate Countess, drafted by John Marston and completed by William Barksted and Lewis Machin, is one of the most provocative plays of the era when it comes to sex and marriage.[12] The first Act introduces two wedding plots, one tragic, one comic. In the latter, a 'bloody bridal' (1.1.148) threatens when the wedding parties of two sworn enemies meet. Their skirmish dissipates the sexual energy, the 'triumph' at 'tilt', owed to their wives (142-4). Allusions are made to 'broken nuptials' both ancient (Lapiths and Centaurs) and medieval/modern (Montagues and Capulets), hinting at tragic potential; jests about cutting off a (maiden)head (145-7) presage the play's execution scene. The grooms determine to cuckold each other, but their wives arrange a double bed-trick, agreeing to substitute for one another. This mock-adultery serves as a displaced consummation of sorts, the actual wedding night having left one bride 'starved' of pleasure and the other unaware of the 'wonders' her husband can perform (2.2.17, 3.3.15). It takes the aphrodisiac effect of revenge to inspire the men to a sexual performance 'strong in pleasure' (3.3.13), at once licit and illicit.[13]

A sense of erotic displacement is stronger still in the tragic plot, which opens with a match made between Isabella, the widowed Countess of Swevia, and Roberto, Count of Cyprus. The dangerous sexual potency of Isabella is figured in the staging of the first scene, as her 'dark hole' (a black-shrouded cell) is approached by 'unruly members' (rival suitors). Although Isabella hated her possessive late husband, and delights in being 'free as air' (1.1.52), she is won over by Roberto, who espouses chaste, if idolatrous, marital ideals. At their wedding party, however, Isabella falls in love with Guido, Count of Arsena, during a 'change' in the dance. Guido falls by accident into her lap, drawn it seems by her irresistible sexual will. Matrimonial desire is banished with a command that suggests both guilt and defiance: 'Hymen take flight,/ And see not me, 'tis not my wedding night' (2.1.160-1). Isabella goes to her 'nuptial bed,/ The heaven on earth' not in anticipation but as a mourner 'to the house

[12] See Melchiori 1984 and Wiggins 1998 on date and authorship; see also Cathcart 2008: Chap. 5 on the possibility that Marston first drafted the play c.1601.
[13] The bed-tricks are interrupted by the watch, leading Wiggins 1998 (note to 3.3.11) to suggest that at least one marriage remains unconsummated – but both women seem to find satisfaction *before* the disturbance.

of death' (243-6), a further instance of the wedding-as-funeral trope. The dramatists invert the humanist rhetorical mode in which the marriage bed is the centre of harmonious cosmic attention:

> Sullen Night,
> That lookest with sunk eyes on my nuptial bed,
> With ne'er a star that smiles upon the end,
> Mend thy slack pace, and lend the malcontent,
> The hoping lover, and the wishing bride
> Beams that too long thou shadowest; or if not,
> In spite of thy fixed front, when my loathed mate
> Shall struggle in due pleasure for his right,
> I'll think 't my love, and die in that delight. 2.1.250-58

The epithalamic tradition looks to bestow a long night of love, but the Countess wishes the oppressive darkness to pass quickly, comparing herself to others who are similarly impatient. Poignantly, the list includes a 'wishing bride', an expectant virgin on the night before her wedding day. The parallel might suggest an underlying romantic idealism, despite Isabella's own bridal disillusionment. Failing a swift night, she hopes that imagination will see her through, envisaging a sexual climax spurred by adulterous fantasy – a link to the comic plot.

On the next morning, the Countess, rather than Hymen, takes flight. After a brief battle with her conscience, erotic disappointment wins out: 'My husband's not the man I would have had' (2.3.45). The offstage '*trampling of horses*' that designates her departure is thought a 'Hurricano coming' (2.4.1).[14] A sexual whirlwind blows through the playhouse. Again, the post-nuptial timing is significant: Roberto enters in his nightgown, exclaiming against his wife who 'let the nuptial tapers give light to her new lust' (28). He cuts a forlorn, emasculated figure, forsaken 'when pleasure's in the full' (20), and renounces sensual life to become a friar.[15] Isabella, however, hurls herself into the realm of the senses, careering from one man to another. Her capricious carnality has a comic aspect, but she is a tragic 'victim of her own sexuality', as Martin Wiggins puts it, 'powerlessly watching herself spin out of control'.[16] She is the era's most striking representation of a female libertine. Her Epicurean ambition to

[14] See Womack 2013: 71-73 on the offstage sound effects.
[15] Cf. Antonio's decision at the end of *Antonio's Revenge*.
[16] Wiggins 1998: xiv.

'Distil from love the quintessence of pleasure' (3.2.13) bears comparison with that of various lustful stage-tyrants, but seems more transgressive when voiced (and acted upon) by a woman. The libel that prompts her murderous revenge makes clear the competing discourses, pitting marital idealism against libertinism: 'That sacrilegious thief to Hymen's rights,/ Making her lust her god, heav'n her delights' (4.2.16-17). Guido, the author, conveniently forgets his own 'sacrilegious' role in eloping with her. The playwrights are clearly aware of such double standards: Don Sago, the Spanish lover who carries out the murder of Guido at Isabella's behest, is not only pardoned but promoted by the Spanish overlord, the Duke of Medina. Admittedly, Sago shows contrition before the bloody corpse of Guido, placed onstage for the execution scene as an irrefutable reminder of guilt. Isabella, however, is unrepentant: 'He died deservedly… a chronicler of his own vice' (5.1.79-81). This is both malevolent and astute. That she considers herself an innocent, worthy of reprieve, is signaled by her choice of attire: '*her hair hanging down, a chaplet of flowers on her head, a nosegay in her hand*' (5.1.66sd). The scarlet woman dresses, provocatively, as a virginal bride.

The tragic wedding framework – part of Marston's initial conception – is apparent not only from Isabella's costume but also from the reappearance of her husband as a friar, a major change from the sources.[17] Roberto reminds her of her bridal 'Apostasy and vile revolt' (166), yet his tone is compassionate. Their embrace, kneeling to each other on the scaffold, appareled as pilgrim and maiden, is an iconographic knot. It seems at once a remarriage and a renunciation: 'The kiss thou gavest me in the church, here take' (194). Regretting the 'lawful' pleasures they might have enjoyed (185), Isabella begs and receives pardon. The absolution offered by Roberto, as her *husband*, has greater spiritual weight 'Than all the grave instructions of the Church' (190). Isabella faces her onstage execution bravely, renouncing 'Murder and Lust', being urged to 'die a rare example' (218, 194). Mary Bly, citing Isabella as a prime example, suggests that Renaissance playwrights could only portray the behaviour of a lascivious woman if she is made 'an example of wickedness'.[18] Moral certainties are blurred here, however. As Fiona Martin points out, Isabella's final moments

[17] See Melchiori 1984: 25.
[18] Bly 1994: 37.

encourage sympathy, being infused with 'unexpected dignity'.[19] She is blessed by the cardinal and treated gently by her executioner, with whom she engages in a poignant final flirtation: 'We will be for thee straight' (215). The onstage beheading puts a stop to her career as a female libertine, and emblematises her crossing of the threshold as a reconfigured virgin. An audacious blend of morality and melodrama allows a scandalous murderess to seem a martyr, as worthy of tears as Heywood's repentant adulteresses, Jane Shore and Anne Frankford, both of whom are 'new-married in death'.[20] Isabella puts perfection on as a bride-of-death. Roberto descends the scaffold, his passionate pilgrimage fulfilled. All of this is missed by the Duke, the figure of temporal authority. He had earlier left the stage – just before Roberto's arrival – intimidated by Isabella's wit and vitriol: 'I'll be gone: off with her head there' (147). Now he returns to issue a misogynous condemnation of 'all women so insatiate' (229). For an audience that has witnessed the spousal reconciliation, the empathetic exchanges, and Isabella's brave end, the Duke sounds callous and jarring. Whilst the playwrights emphasise the dangers of unbridled female desire, they nevertheless use the 'broken nuptial' framework to complex and compassionate tragic effect.

The libertine threat to marriage is a more externalised one in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, a tragicomic romance centred on defloration. The play has often been found convoluted, but the 'delayed consummation' scheme is a (perhaps *the*) major structural principle. The opening depicts another 'broken nuptial', with Imogen and Posthumous parted by the angry King Cymbeline, Imogen's father, when their secret marriage is discovered. The couple have affianced themselves by means of a hand-fast ceremony in a temple dedicated to Jupiter, making their match both clandestine and consecrated. The setting is ancient Britain but the matrimonial mores are early modern. Disputes over what constituted marriage in Shakespeare's England, with its variance between canon and civil law, affected people of all backgrounds, but noble matches were subject to particularly strict governance. The rival suitor, Cloten, deems Imogen's 'self-figur'd knot' acceptable for beggars but dismisses 'The contract you pretend' as having no legal basis, being curbed by 'consequence o' th' crown'

[19] Martin 2009: 16.
[20] Ure 1974: 156.

(2.3.113-21).[21] Cloten's confidence that the marriage can be revoked also rests on an assumption – unspoken but fundamental – that it is unconsummated, that Imogen remains a suitably virginal prospective bride for a future king.[22] We learn about the sexual side of the relationship from Posthumus who reveres Imogen's modesty, professing himself 'her adorer, not her friend [ie. lover]' (1.4.68-9), until he believes himself betrayed, at which point her restraint becomes a terrible grievance:

> O, vengeance, vengeance!
> Me of my lawful pleasure she restrain'd,
> And pray'd me oft forbearance, did it with
> A pudency so rosy… that I thought her
> As chaste as unsunn'd snow. 2.5.8-13

They were often intimate but stopped short of intercourse at Imogen's insistence. This need not be a matter of prudery or frigidity as some critics have presumed.[23] Her hesitancy might stem from concerns – widely shared in the era – over whether sex would indeed be 'lawful' in an unsolemnized match made against parental wishes.[24] That said, Ruth Nevo could be right to detect a 'fear of sexual surrender' as Imogen struggles 'to resolve the ambivalence of untried sexuality',[25] an ambivalence felt in the 'pudency so rosy' oxymoron. This is a rites of passage drama, with Imogen seemingly on the cusp of adulthood.[26] Her family situation is far from propitious: her natural mother is dead, her brothers are long missing, and her father is in thrall to his necromantic Queen. The court is contaminated by the boorish (if sometimes astute) Cloten and his sycophantic or dissembling followers. For whatever reason, personal, familial or political, Imogen remains in what Marie Loughlin calls a 'virginal-wifely'

[21] There are parallels with the case of Arbella Stuart as noted by Barton 1994: 22.
[22] Gesner 1970: 102 identifies Imogen as a romance-style virgin, but a secure (in my view) critical understanding of this point did not arrive until Barton's 1994 essay on the play. Others who consider Imogen a virgin, or probably so, include Bergeron 1983: 160, Nevo 2003: 104, Loughlin 1997: 47, Schwarz 1970: 232, and Woodbridge 1992: 277. The debate is not as heated as that over *Othello*, but various critics argue that the marriage is consummated, or see the matter as indeterminate eg. Bamford 2000: 86, Butler 2005: 26 and 33n1, Hunt 2002: 412n21, Warren 1998: 32-3.
[23] Barton 1994: 23, inc. n24., notes and refutes such readings.
[24] Ingram 1987: 54 observes that 'church courts increasingly brought prosecutions for incontinence before solemnization'. Such concerns increased in the wake of the canons of 1604. Shakespeare reflects the contention in plays such as *Measure for Measure* (Claudio/ Juliet), *The Winter's Tale* (Perdita/Florizel) and *The Tempest* (Miranda/Ferdinand).
[25] Nevo 2003: 104, 114.
[26] We do not know Imogen's age but she readily passes for a pageboy. She seems younger than her brothers who are themselves described as 'striplings' (5.3.19) though ostensibly in their early twenties.

state,[27] caught, as numerous allusions suggest, between the competing claims of Venus and Diana.

Shakespeare's wedded-yet-unbedded design again places lovers in a liminal limbo, insecure and vulnerable. Posthumus is seduced by Jachimo's wager, whilst Imogen faces the machinations of the Queen and the unwanted attentions of Cloten. The virginity of the heroine is, like Sophonisba's, mystically associated with a land under threat of invasion;[28] the question as to who will possess 'The temple/ Of virtue' (5.5.220-1) is central. National integrity depends on Imogen remaining pure until she can 'enjoy [her] banish'd lord' (2.1.65). The sexual predators, Jachimo and Cloten, represent sophisticated continental vice and crude homegrown lubricity. Threats to the marriage are figured as 'substitute deflowerings',[29] in which loving sexual energies are displaced by perverse alternatives. Jachimo is a Renaissance libertine in ancient Rome; his portrait of a debauched Posthumus is drawn from his own life (1.4.85-139). He subjects Imogen to a symbolic rape in the bedchamber scene, signified by his illicit entrance to the chamber itself, by his removal of Imogen's trothplight bracelet as she sleeps,[30] and by the leaf of her book 'turn'd down/ Where Philomele gave up' (2.2.45-6). Properties and stage space are eroticised, capitalising on Shakespeare's earlier breakthroughs in staging domestic intimacy. There are various echoes of the *Othello* bedchamber scene: the midnight (nuptial) hour, the virginal woman asleep, the male onlooker intoxicated by perfumed breath and sensual lips. Jachimo is torn between desire and reverence in his scopophilia. The 'mole cinque-spotted' he uncovers on her breast, 'like the crimson drops/ I' th' bottom of a cowslip', might be suggestive of hymeneal blood (37-9).[31] Cowslips are yellow but Imogen herself is a 'fresh lily… whiter than the sheets' (15-16). She is, as G. Wilson Knight observes, 'delicately, intimately, touched by the poetry'.[32] A necrophilic aspect is felt with the tester-bed figured once more as a tomb: 'be her sense but as a monument,/ Thus in a chapel lying' (32-3). But where Desdemona lay indeed in her death-bed, Imogen's chastity casts a protective spell in this tragicomic variant. Jachimo is ultimately

[27] Loughlin 1997: 63.
[28] See Woodbridge 1992: 276-9, Kahn 1997: 164-9, and Butler 2005: 36-54.
[29] Loughlin 1997: 69.
[30] Barton 1994: 5, 24 links the bracelet to the hymen. See also Schwarz 1970: 242.
[31] Cf. the 'little western flower/ Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.1.166-7.
[32] Wilson Knight 2002: 154.

purged of cynical carnality by her goddess-like purity, though not before he puts his inventory to near-tragic use, by 'rewrit[ing] her chaste and erotic duality as duplicity'.[33] The critique of libertine values is unusually didactic for Shakespeare: Jachimo learns 'the wide difference/ 'Twixt amorous and villainous' (5.5.194-5).[34] Moral absolutes are attenuated, however, by a 'partly unconscious collusion between the deceived and the deceiver' in the wager plot.[35] As in *Othello*, the callow husband of a female paragon is drawn vicariously into misogynous fantasy and murderous revenge before the marriage can be consummated. A bedchamber scene again calls for the audience's 'vicarious participation in forbidden acts and wishes'[36] – so much so that the temptations of a libertine aesthetic are powerfully felt even as they are repudiated.

Shakespeare further tests moral absolutism with the other main surrogate defloration scene, in which the headless corpse of Cloten, dressed as Posthumus, serves as a gruesome substitute bridegroom, laid next to Imogen in her mock-death sleep. Shakespeare draws on Greek romance, but, as Roger Warren notes, there is no source that depicts 'a heroine waking beside a decapitated body wearing her husband's clothes'.[37] Affronted by Imogen's valuation of him at less than Posthumus's 'mean'st garment', Cloten threatens a fetishistic nuptial revenge: 'With that suit upon my back will I ravish her' (2.3.133; 3.5.137-8).[38] He also plans to behead his rival, but the savage farce sees Cloten himself beheaded before he can fulfil either fantasy. Imogen, disguised as a boy, is mourned by her long-lost brothers with a tender dirge that ends on the benign wish, 'Quiet consummation have' (4.2.280). This looks forward to spiritual peace, but also touches on the sexual meaning of consummation. With the strewing of flowers over the bodies we see, as so often in Shakespeare, 'funeral rites merged into marriage symbolism'.[39] The flowers that might have decked Imogen's bride-bed were earlier cropped by the Queen for nefarious purposes, but custom is

[33] James 1997: 178.
[34] Though see also Lysimachus's brothel-based conversion in *Pericles*.
[35] Hill 1984: 60.
[36] Schwarz 1970: 227.
[37] Warren 1998: 1n1. See also Gesner 1970: Chap. 4, and Butler 2005: 8-10.
[38] This is the same costume worn by Posthumus for the 'broken nuptials' and gift exchange of Act 1.
[39] Colman 1974: 138.

here honoured for a virginal 'lily' (201).[40] As in *Romeo and Juliet*, attention is drawn to the double meaning of the flowers, felt by Imogen to betoken both love and grief as she wakes to a necrophilic nightmare. She clasps the corpse in 'a bizarre parody of consummation', or 'a mad burlesque of sexual passion',[41] even painting her cheeks with blood at the close of an anguished heroic blazon.

The scene is the culmination of such an elaborately plotted sequence that Warren wonders if it was 'Shakespeare's starting point… what he wrote the play for'.[42] Like the bedchamber scene, the mock-tragic consummation has drawn a good deal of critical attention. Opinion varies as to its merits. For some, such as Robert Ornstein, Shakespeare succumbs to a gratuitous Fletcherian theatricality that lacks artistic seriousness; the audience 'inevitably titters' over the 'contrived grotesquerie' at the cost of genuine pathos.[43] Warren's accounts of twentieth century productions show, however, that the horror of the scene can have an intense emotional impact, one not necessarily impeded by 'nervous' or 'squeamish' laughter.[44] Others argue that 'we watch the action with a degree of amused detachment as well as sympathy';[45] Imogen's grief is genuine but her view of the loathsome Cloten as a godlike nonpareil has comic incongruity. Romantic idolatry is both indulged and satirised. The sequence is at once macabre, moving and laughable, offering 'a grotesque indeterminacy of tragic and comic effects'.[46] 'Broken nuptials' lead to various symbolic deflorations in the drama of the era, but none quite as outlandish as this experimental fusion of affective melodrama and absurdist irony.

The headless corpse scene has often been found bewildering or disquieting, with some considering Shakespeare unnecessarily punitive or even sadistic in subjecting Imogen to such a rites-of-passage ordeal.[47] Others argue for a prophylactic effect with regard to anxieties surrounding marriage and defloration, one that draws on ancient psychological and ritual roots via Hellenistic romance. The loss of Cloten's head

[40] Cf. the prophesy about Queen Elizabeth in *Henry VIII* 'yet a virgin,/ A most unspotted lily shall she pass/ To th' ground' (5.4.60-2).
[41] Kahn 1997: 164; Taylor 1983: 99.
[42] Warren 1998: 42.
[43] Ornstein 1986: 207-8.
[44] Warren 1989: 16, 56-7.
[45] Foakes 1971: 113.
[46] Nevo 2003: 108.
[47] See, for example, Adelman 1992: 211 and Palfrey 1997: 217-18.

means that Imogen's (maiden)head is preserved in a ghastly enactment of a familiar *double entendre*.[48] The play also looks forward to gothic fiction with its dark and sometimes farcical doubling.[49] Cloten serves as 'a parodic surrogate for Posthumus both in life and in death'.[50] He gets his wish of lying with his rival's wife, albeit posthumously. The surreal love scene has a bearing on Posthumus's recovery, whether viewed in psychological or providential terms. Warren observes that 'the dark aspect of Posthumus… is largely buried in the surrogate form of Cloten'.[51] Purged of murderous misogyny, Posthumus comes to the startling conclusion – radical in a socially conservative play – that an adulterous 'wrying but a little' is a venial sin in a wife (5.1.5).[52] He fights against the Roman invasion to expiate his guilt – and this too is a nuptial rite.

The invasion itself has erotic implications, symbolising an imperial/libertine threat to Britain/Imogen. The battle is fought in 'sexual terrain',[53] with the Britons taking their stand in a turfed narrow lane. Nuptial displacement finds its final form here: 'the Roman army is fended off in the act of breaching Britain's maidenhead'.[54] Posthumus '*vanquisheth and disarmeth*' Jachimo, whose own guilt 'Takes off [his] manhood' (5.2.2), purging him of the vestiges of libertinism. Posthumus, no longer emasculated, having passed through these transition rites, is finally a hero worthy of love; the 'delight' that awaits him will, according to a homiletic Jupiter, prove sweeter for being 'more delay'd' (5.3.102). This is a structural principle of romance. Consummation awaits beyond the bounds of the play, though it is presaged in a single monosyllabic (split-line) pentameter as the reunited Imogen and Posthumus embrace: 'Hang there like fruit, my soul,/ Till the tree die!' (5.4.263-4). The lovers form an emblem in which desire meets fruition, but the packed recognition scene allows no time to dwell on an ineffable vision at once Edenic and apocalyptic. The play revisits Shakespeare's earlier slandered-bride and jealous-groom plots and, as in *Much Ado*

[48] For jests about cutting off heads/maidenheads see Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* 1.1.23-6; Dekker, *Satiromastix* 2.1.86-7; Marston, *The Insatiate Countess* 1.1.145-7.
[49] Cf. the Erictho episode in *Sophonisba*.
[50] Hartwig 1972: 62. The two men never appear onstage together but are often identified with one another. See also Siemon 1976: 55-61 and James 1997: 156-62 on parallels and distinctions between the two.
[51] Warren 1990: 71.
[52] See Barton 1994 and James 1997 on this theme.
[53] Kahn 1997: 164. See also Butler 2005: 52 on the 'erotic geography' and masculine identity.
[54] Woodbridge 1992: 278.

About Nothing, the bride is restored to her husband seemingly from beyond the grave. In *Cymbeline*, however, there is a far greater struggle, post-*Othello*, to retrieve matrimonial faith from the tragic ashes.

Innovative tragicomic staging is also spurred by rival marital and sexual claims in Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy, or The Honest Man's Revenge*. As in *Cymbeline*, a delayed consummation is crucial, wedding and funeral rites are yoked together, and the heroine faces the threat of sexual violence – here motivated by a more doctrinal libertinism on the part of the villain. Most critical attention has been devoted to the revenge theme and to the play's thesis, an argument in favour of Christian providence over the claims of materialist scepticism. The bawdy subplot has received some attention too, but relatively little has been made of the central love story which provides as important a dramatic frame as the tale of murder and revenge. Chastity and lust are pitted against each other throughout in didactic vein, but Tourneur, as Irving Ribner observes, 'couches his pietistic moral lesson in a rich assortment of thrilling episodes'.[55] As in *Cymbeline*, the bravura theatricality calls for simultaneous engagement and detachment on the part of the audience. The most compelling of the episodes are nocturnal scenes which blend tragedy and farce in the treatment of displaced nuptial consummations.

Tourneur's lovers are separated initially by the decision of his hero, Charlemont, to go to war, supporting the Protestant cause in the Low Countries. Before his departure he is betrothed to Castabella, forming a contract which the Puritan chaplain, Langbeau Snuffe, promises to vouch for. Charlemont's leavetaking speech is rather stiff but Castabella ensures that their parting kiss joins 'mutual and incorporated breaths' into 'one contracted life' (1.2.91-2). The lingering kiss brings a comic warning against carnality from Snuffe, an important point to note given that some have felt the pair to lack passion.[56] A primly restrained kiss would ruin the comedy of the moment. The hypocritical Snuffe reneges on his promise when bribed by Charlemont's villainous uncle, D'Amville; the latter funds his nephew's military venture so that his own son, Rousard, can marry Castabella in his absence. Castabella rebuffs Rousard but is forced into marriage by her family. Tragic implications are signaled with her warning:

[55] Ribner 1964: lvii.
[56] Levin 1971: 77, for example, finds Snuffe's warning inapplicable to the lovers.

‘Perhaps you’ll curse the fatal hour wherein/ You rashly marry’d me’ (1.4.120-1). The bride cuts an unhappy figure at the wedding feast even before a false report of Charlemont’s death is delivered by D’Amville’s accomplice, Borachio. D’Amville, like many villains on the early modern stage, delights in perverting ‘the ordinary rites/ And ceremonies due to festivals’ (2.4.123-4).[57] Charlemont’s grief-stricken father, Montferrers, persuaded to make a new will in favour of D’Amville, is promptly murdered on his way home. Social decorum masks the crime in the double funeral for Montferrers and Charlemont that follows, but between these public rituals comes a wedding night that involves a breach beyond D’Amville’s control. Castabella stoically resigns herself to her fate, despite complaining to Heaven of a ‘double misery’, being both ‘divorc’d/ From love’ and ‘marry’d unto hate’ (2.3.9-12). In the event, she is spared the conjugal duty she most fears in what seems a heavenly intercession:

ROUSARD Nay, ’troth, sweetheart, I will not trouble thee.
Thou shalt not lose thy maidenhead tonight.
CASTABELLA O might that weakness ever be in force,
I never would desire to sue divorce. 2.3.30-33

The groom is rendered impotent by an unspecified illness, though the banter of Act 1.3 might suggest syphilis – Rousard’s ‘buffets among the boys’ (13) are sexual, I suspect. He later wonders if his affliction was a punishment for sin, noting that it began ‘The very day I marry’d Castabella’ (3.4.64). Alternatively, we might deem it the fulfilment of a curse made by D’Amville’s other son, Sebastian – an intriguing libertine-sceptic with a discerning moral sensibility – who decries the forced marriage as a rape: ‘for [Castabella’s] sake may his ability die in his appetite’ (1.4.140-1).

However it is, the bride’s virginity is preserved, much to her relief, in one of the most striking of ‘delayed consummation’ plots. Rousard is genuine in his apologies for being ‘such a weak unpleasing bedfellow’ (3.4.69) and is ultimately treated with some sympathy. He seems a tragic victim of his father’s atheistic scheme to seek eternity not through salvation but through patrilineal provision of worldly wealth and power. The impotence scenario is at first, however, an occasion for comedy. Castabella’s stepmother, Levidulcia, bawdily exhorts the bride and groom to sexual performance and mocks their lack of passion: ‘One wants desire, the t’other ability’ (2.3.39).

[57] See Murray 1964: 64-87 on the play’s maimed rites.

Ironically, Levidulcia had earlier used the probable return of Charlemont as 'sick, lame, and impotent' from the wars as a prime reason why Castabella should marry Rousard (1.4.97). The stepmother's own blood is so vicariously inflamed on the wedding night that she could 'clasp with any man' (62). A type of bedroom farce follows, a satire on female erotomania with echoes of *The Insatiate Countess*. The licit sexual energies of the marriage are siphoned off into an adulterous liaison between Levidulcia and Sebastian, the latter having the seminal 'spirit of a man' (58).[58] A further layer of wedding night action, the murder of Montferrers, is played as black comedy. D'Amville takes a perversely eroticised pleasure in the crime, calling night 'Thou beauteous mistress of a murderer' (2.4.179); later, in the play's most famous lines, he personifies Murder as a strumpet with whom he sins behind the brothel doors and curtains of 'this great chamber of the world… this bed of earth' (4.3.215-221). Montferrers is killed with a pair of stones: 'Such stones men use to raise a house upon' (2.4.1). Many critics have noted the play's extensive building imagery, but there is also a pun here on the 'stones' as testicles. D'Amville looks to found a dynasty, yet his eldest son is impotent and his libidinous youngest son is drawn into an illicit affair that will end in his death. The villains treat the wedding night events as 'a sweet comedy' (84) but, needless to say, the joke is finally on them.

The staging of maimed rites continues when Charlemont returns to find Castabella mourning at his tomb. He is enraged to hear that she has changed from 'maid to wife' (3.1.96), taking her to mean that she is not only married but also no longer a virgin. Before she can clarify matters, he bitterly assumes (echoing Levidulcia) that she feared the return of a sexually maimed soldier. He is then comically astounded – 'O strange incontinence!' – to learn of her apparent choice of a man who has 'no skill/ To do't' (3.1.111-16). This is not the response of a passionless lover. Nor is Castabella the embodiment of an arch chastity. Her relief over Rousard's incapacity – 'That weakness pleases me in him I have'; 'I am as much respectless to enjoy/ Such pleasure as ignorant what it is' (3.1.110; 3.5.71-2) – has sometimes been felt to signal a general indifference to sex, but this, as Peter Murray points out, is to ignore the politic nature of her statements.[59] The context is crucial, as with other chaste paragons

[58] Cf. the illicit liaison of Wildbraine and Mistress Newlove during the tragicomic wedding night of Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Night Walker* (c.1611) – another play with a farcical graveyard scene.
[59] Murray 1964: 88.

such as Imogen and Sophonisba. Castabella's earlier banter with Rousard (all but ignored by critics) makes it clear that she wants a man 'able to do me service' (1.3.6). That said, celibate principles are raised in the Act 4 graveyard scene as the matter of defloration is brought to a head. D'Amville, despairing of his sons, attempts to father a child by raping Castabella. Tourneur creates superb gothic farce, running this action alongside Borachio's attempted murder of Charlemont, and Snuffe's attempted seduction of Soquette, '*a seeming gentlewoman*'. Charlemont, having killed Borachio in self-defence, hides in a charnel house disguised (unwittingly) as his father's ghost. He overhears D'Amville propose to satisfy Castabella in a displaced consummation with 'the full performance of/ Thy empty husband's duty' (4.3.102-3). The young virgin denounces his libertine justification of incest,[60] imploring a heavenly intervention:

> O would the grave might open, and my body
> Were bound to the dead carcass of a man
> For ever, ere it entertain the lust
> Of this detested villain. 4.3.170-73.

Charlemont rises up on cue, frightening D'Amville out of his sceptical wits. Tourneur's God clearly has a theatrical sense of humour. The play's divine intercessions are so preposterous that it is tempting to read it as a satire on providentialism as much as on atheism.[61] But the romantic action that follows treats Christian patience with evident seriousness. Instead of escaping, as Castabella urges, Charlemont bids her to lie down with him. He wishes his life to end since he is deprived 'of those blessings that/ Should make me love it' (192-3) – the blessings, that is, of companionate marriage. The lovers choose to sleep, each of them with a skull for a pillow, making of the charnel house a surrogate bedchamber.

This non-naturalistic action has divided critics. For Una Ellis-Fermor, 'probability has been too ruthlessly sacrificed' in the lovers' sudden quiescence.[62] Their action could indeed seem emblematic of a chastity 'rigid almost to the point of absurdity'.[63] They never contemplate adultery, even though their betrothal could be said to legitimise a

[60] As in *Cymbeline*, a sexual threat comes from within the family (though in neither case from a blood relative).
[61] For Dollimore 2004: 88, the play 'constantly threatens to transgress its own providentialist brief'.
[62] Ellis-Fermor 1936: 168n1.
[63] Ribner 1964: lvi.

sexual union. Yet they do create a marriage bed of sorts. Tourneur stages an alternative nuptial, the purity of which is immediately highlighted when Snuffe, the puritan-turned-libertine, nearly sodomises Borachio's corpse, mistaking it for Soquette in the dark. Again, the sexual energies of licit consummation are diverted into illicit acts. D'Amville, arriving with the watch, sexualises the bed-tomb emblem, insinuating that the lovers' rest is post-coital, framing them for adultery as well as murder in an Iago-esque attempt to use virtue against itself. D'Amville's last-gasp conversion has its roots, however, in his brief contemplation of the pair sleeping 'so sweetly upon death's heads' (284-5). The tableau shakes him with its quiet refutation of scepticism; the lovers are orthodox Christian stoics yet their absurdist action dramatises a kind of radical innocence. Defenders of the scene have noted a medieval aspect to their *contemptus mundi*, a celibate renunciation within *memento mori* environs.[64] They wake in the necropolis as if reborn; in the judgement scene they leap ardently on to the execution scaffold, welcoming a chaste union in death, a mutual martyrdom 'hand in hand' (5.2.239). When Castabella suggests that it is more sanctified to die young and virginal, strewn with 'green herbs' (133), before virtue is corrupted, Tourneur seems to advocate a return to medieval ascetic principles. Ironically, however, the final twist means that those prepared to renounce worldliness are rewarded in the material realm, accruing all the benefits sought by D'Amville. The latter's end is figured as a sexual abasement: 'O,/ The lust of death commits a rape upon me' (266-7). With the threat of forced or surrogate defloration behind her, Castabella embraces Charlemont with a promise as erotic in intent as anything spoken by the play's appetitive libertines, most of whom end up dead:

CASTABELLA Now at last
Enjoy the full possession of my love,
As clear and pure as my first chastity.
CHARLEMONT The crown of all my blessings! I will tempt
My stars no longer, nor protract my time
Of marriage. When those nuptial rites are done,
I will perform my kinsmen's funerals. 5.2.289-295

The erotic promise of 'full possession' and the expectation of a crowning joy are not the pronouncements of a couple indifferent to sex. In the phrase 'nor protract my time/

[64] See Murray 1964: 59 and 139-40, for example.

Of marriage', Charlemont shows a reflexive awareness of genre, putting nuptial rites ahead of funeral rites, unwilling to risk another delay to consummation. The move to an offstage sexual union is the traditional end of romantic comedy, though here the family circles of both parties have been tragically obliterated. Richard Levin argues that Tourneur has it both ways in converting a 'virginal *Liebestod* into a conventional marriage', giving Charlemont and Castabella a fulfilment that is at once sexual and asexual, worldly and transcendent.[65] This is astute, although the playwright's bias is very much in favour of Renaissance matrimonial idealism. Virginal martyrdom – the residual discourse – offers a spiritual reward, but it stands as a default option for those denied companionate blessings, as we saw with Sophonisba in Chapter 4. Libertinism – the emergent discourse – is refuted through promoting wedlock as a licit bower of bliss. Tourneur depicts a marriage 'fatal' only to those who oppose it, using a 'delayed consummation' plot to create *romantic* (as well as revenge) drama of mimetic, thematic and affective range.

'IF THOULT/ WEDD THY BLOOD TO MINE': *LIEBESTOD* AND ANTI-*LIEBESTOD* IN *THE FATAL MARRIAGE*, *THE COURAGEOUS TURK* AND *THE CHANGELING*

In the plays just discussed, traditional affective appeal is blended with new levels of sophistication and irony in the presentation of surrogate deflorations. The prevailing tragicomic mode of Jacobean theatre 'trades on a combination of emotional involvement and aesthetic distance', one that requires 'a double commitment from the audience'.[66] Playgoers lay themselves open to emotion, yet look on coolly, perhaps sceptically, at the familiar tropes and motifs, the reshuffled pack. How easy is it to maintain this balance? In *A Cure for a Cuckold*, for example, the suicidal distress of Clare, who loves the bridegroom, Bonvile, 'almost to a degree of madness' (4.2.75), is treated with evident seriousness. She is one of the era's most enigmatically pained wedding guests. Yet the folkloric riddle she sets for her own love-crazed suitor, Lessingham, at whose hand she looks to die, triggers a series of 'brittle and extreme

[65] Levin 1971: 158.
[66] Butler 2005: 18; Hartwig 1972: 18.

plot convolutions' which,[67] despite bordering on tragedy, grow increasingly farcical. Lessingham becomes a cod-Iago, exploiting love-tokens in a 'plot to wrong the Bride', stirring jealous discord out of 'disappointed… Nuptial sweets' (5.1.75, 83). Critical debate on the play centres on whether these convolutions are to be enjoyed as a send-up of passionate theatricality (toying with dramatic conventions), or decried for undermining psychological realism (toying with serious emotions).[68] Either way, there is no question that the dramatists toy calculatedly with the 'tragic wedding' convention to *tragicomic* effect.

But what of tragedy itself, when, in an effort to stave off the passé, its conventions acquire an ironical patina? Janette Dillon is quite right to suggest that 'scenic memory' can lead to a 'powerfully enriched dramaturgy', but what is the impact on affect when 'theatrical literacy' has been widely established, when playwrights, players and playgoers are all trained in the tricks of the trade?[69] Does familiarization breed entropy, the 'decadence' so often decried by a previous generation of critics? By the second decade of the seventeenth century, the 'tragic wedding' convention had, I suggest, reached a point in its development where knowingness became an artistic dilemma. Some dramatists found themselves ruled or even ensnared by the theatregram; others looked to subvert or reposition it, challenging some of the assumptions on which it was founded. We will see this process in the plays I consider in this section, all three of which contain a tragically displaced (as opposed to delayed) consummation. The subverted erotic union either occurs onstage, in bedchamber scenes of murder or martyrdom, or is figured, as in *The Changeling*, by a range of symbolic means. There is a continued emphasis on farce and sensationalism, but with a stronger sense of working within, or challenging, the parameters of an established theatregram.

Levin draws attention to the *liebestod* in his discussion of *The Atheist's Tragedy*. It had been a major feature of English romantic tragedy since *Tancred and Gismund*, and had become increasingly associated with the wedding night since *Romeo and Juliet*. We will see significant examples of wedding night love-martyrs in the next

[67] Carnegie 2003: 286.
[68] Pearson 1980: 115-36 and Forker 1986: 172-89 make strong cases on either side. See also Gunby's Critical Introduction 2003: 264-281.
[69] Dillon 2013: 209.

chapter in works by Beaumont and Fletcher. A sense of the *liebestod*'s prevalence as a topos can be seen in the unattributed *The Fatal Marriage, or the Second Lucretia*, a work that probably belongs to the early 1620s (though it could be a rewriting of an earlier play).[70] It tells of young Italians going against parental will in marriage. Two of its three plots end happily, with the lovers free to marry. The third ends, however, in a triple suicide: the lovers, Galeas and Lucretia (or Lucrece), and their faithful servant, Iachimo, are joined together in death. The main tragic scene opens with Galeas creating a charmed circle:

> *Enter Galeas solus*
> he that can tell mee why I strawe these fflowers
> what this branch rosemary shewes or what rue
> is prologue too, why this neglected time
> I have made choice of time [thyme] to spread with these
> which of you can but resolve mee this
> knowes more than I my selfe 1991-6.[71]

Despite asking for the audience for insight, Galeas goes on to explain the device himself. In order to avoid an enforced marriage he has 'plotted this… tragedy' so that he and Lucretia can share 'one ffatal hearse' ritually strewn with flowers (2004-5). Galeas tells his mother, Leonara, that the 'bed of fflowers' is meant as 'mariage pompe' to welcome the noble bride she has provided for him, with whom he looks to 'ruffle it like an incorporate May gamist' (2034, 2044). He would 'rue' not using his 'time [thyme]' well in preparation (2045-50). His sly puns unnerve rather than reassure Leonara, especially since he warns her to 'beware the ffayrie circle if you touch/ the selvadge on't you are blasted',[72] hinting at an occult power to the 'sweet tapistry' (2001, 2009-10). For playgoers already wise to a 'double meaning' (2012), the strained explanations would ring farcically hollow. They would recognise the strewings as 'herbes ominous' (2037), associated with funerals – though rosemary was worn at weddings too as a sign of fidelity. When Lucretia is smuggled into the chamber, Galeas freely explains the emblematic function of the 'bed of fflowers': 'the ground thou seest thus mantled serves/ either for a ffuneral or bridall' (2134, 2137-8). A suicide pact – 'if thoult/ wedd thy blood to mine' (2180-1) – is swiftly concluded.

[70] See the Malone edition, xi, and Duxfield 2004.
[71] Line numbering is continuous in the Malone edition.
[72] A 'selvadge' is the finished edge of a woven fabric ('tapistry') that prevents fraying.

Lucretia willingly joins Galeas in death to prevent the enforced marriage. With a kind of passionate stoicism, ‘every veine swolne full/ of an heroicke spirit’, they stab themselves and fall within the circle of flowers, ‘to consecrate a tomb to constancy’ (2190-1, 2201).

Notwithstanding the play’s title, the *liebestod* comes somewhat out of the blue. The two other sets of lovers have been condemned to die, but Galeas and Lucretia face no such obvious threat. There is little to support Galeas’s description of his mother as ‘a tigresse’ (2151). Lucretia is not a victim of sexual violence like her Roman namesake (though she is twice abducted, once by Galeas himself). It is not clear why the pair make no bid to escape; it seems a Fletcherian virginal martyrdom is simply too appealing. But if tragic motivation is thin, the ‘ffayrie circle’ scene has, in and of itself, an affective power. The death of the comical servant, Iacomo (who arguably has more of a bond with the lovers than they have between themselves) is touching. Galeas’s sardonic toying with Leonara creates suspense, as does the heartfelt ‘sound of horror’ that escapes his lips at Lucretia’s arrival (2131). In his addresses to the audience, Galeas sounds both knowing and naïve: ‘somewhat lies here/ yet an embrion’ (2122-3). His motives and designs seem at once conscious and subconscious, driven as much by dramatic convention as internal impulse. His mother asks ‘what poet is the author of this story’ (2021). For an audience, the reflexive mode calls for that double perspective – emotional engagement, ironic detachment – demanded by much of the era’s finest drama. If we imagine Jacobean playgoers actually responding to Galeas’s metatheatrical invitation to ‘resolve’ him, many, I suspect, could have explained the semiotic ambiguity, linking nuptials and funerals, without much prompting. The fatal marriage scene is not merely derivative, however. Its ‘ffayrie circle’ or ‘bed of fflowers’ brings something new to the bedchamber-as-tomb trope, the phrases being suggestive of occultism and paganism. May-game associations hint at an escapist bower, but instead of playful fertility rites we witness a sombre *liebestod* performed with chilling ardency.

And that is that. When the bodies of Galeas and Lucretia are brought onstage as the other plots find a happy resolution, they are mourned in the most perfunctory fashion: ‘for galeas wee could weepe and mourne for her/ but now’s a time of nuptial Jubile [jubilee]’ (2395-6). Galeas’s supposedly wicked mother even gets together with

Lucretia's father. The play enacts a kind of *liebestod*-by-rote, a set of habitualized sentiments that were, I feel, starting to be looked at sceptically. One way of avoiding them was to boost the element of shock and horror, as can be demonstrated by the use of 'tragic wedding' conventions on the Jacobean university stage. In Chapter 2, I considered Gager's Elizabethan version of *Dido* at Oxford; the production was spectacular, but the play was constructed, by and large, on 'stately' neoclassical lines. By the seventeenth century, however, many populist elements were often incorporated in academic drama, with the plays of Thomas Goffe a prime example. In his *Orestes*, he presents (like Heywood) the onstage murder of Agamemnon in the bedchamber, an act once more figured as a second marriage. Clytemnestra takes an eroticised vengeful satisfaction: 'now/ Do I count this more then my nuptiall night' (1.4).

More striking still in terms of the 'tragic wedding' theatregram is Goffe's Ottoman history play, *The Courageous Turk, or, Amurath the First*, performed at Oxford in 1618-19. My focus is on the first two Acts, a miniature 'wedding night tragedy' in which a test of masculinity in the nuptial chamber is resolved in sensational fashion. (The final three Acts follow Amurath's career as a ruthless over-reaching conqueror in the Tamberlaine mould.) Goffe reworks the Mahamet and Hiren story, the subject of a famous lost play by Peele.[73] The play opens with Amurath's return from military victory in Greece with a beautiful captive, Eumorphe. He is so enamoured of her that he renounces war and devotes himself to god-like sexual pleasures: '*Jove* Ile outbrave thee!'; '*Hymen* would wed himselfe to such a Bride' (32, 79). His Epicurean fantasies are similar to those of Marston's Countess of Swevia, but he looks to enjoy them within the marriage bond. Amurath determines to marry Eumorphe that night but his tutor, Schahin, has other ideas, believing that Turkish gains will be lost with the king distracted by lust. He also fears that more children (Amurath already has heirs) will destabilise the kingdom. Schahin presents a masque in which Jupiter is struck by Eumorphe's beauty, prompting Juno (goddess of marriage) to call her a strumpet and curse her wedding night: 'When thou sleep'st first a Bride, mayst sleepe thy last' (224). It is a risky strategy on Schahin's part, but the scene concludes on an apparently reassuring note as Cupid promises to protect the bride. This is followed by another masque that praises heroic masculinity (Hector, Achilles, Alexander), whilst

[73] See the Lost Plays Database, which outlines various sources. Eumorphe is called Irene (Hiren) in the play's Argument.

pouring scorn on effeminate 'Milke-sops' (328) who succumb to concupiscence. The masque is used to the opposite purpose of Jonson's *Hymenai* and other wedding entertainments at the Stuart court, looking to curse rather than bless a marriage. Schahin presents his didactic show to Amurath as something 'which once you loved,/ But now are free from' (255-6); it has the desired effect, wounding Amurath's masculine pride and planting a seed of doubt before he departs for bed.

Schahin's next dramaturgical stratagem is to enter the nuptial chamber disguised as the ghost of Amurath's father to demand the death of Eumorphe – as preposterous a scenario as anything the popular stage might offer. The tutor seems rather more *au fait* than his king with dramatic conventions. The bridal chamber scene, which takes up most of Act 2, is worth outlining. There is a standard exchange between the bride and her attendant as Eumorphe is readied for bed. She is wary of her sudden elevation from captive to queen, believing that Amurath's passion will soon burn itself out; her premonition is of tragedy, sensing that this is the 'last Act' in 'a Players Scene' (454-5) – a metatheatrical commonplace. An attempt by her attendant to raise her spirits by naively proclaiming the happiness and security of a king's bed may well have raised a few ironic smiles in the audience. Eumorphe is as modest as any bride of the era, but the misogynous Schahin views her as a strumpet, as do those who share his concerns; one Turkish captain suggests that she will turn from a chaste Lucrece to a wanton Thaisa (413). She is called a concubine in the list of roles, but Goffe emphasises her virtue, giving her an encomium on chaste marriage (135-44). That Eumorphe does not enter the seraglio, but makes a licit matrimonial union, implies her virginal status. (She is a virgin when captured in each of the sources).[74] She requests that the curtains are drawn on the bed as her attendants depart. What follows is an original piece of staging. In a dream sequence, Eumorphe is '*sent to Elizium*' as '*Soft Musicke*' plays and a song expresses heavenly sympathy for the '*poore Queene*' whose '*grave is made i'th Bed of love*' (496-7). Once more a tester-bed stands as a tomb, with an audience primed to witness '*marriage turne to Funerall*' (499).

Amurath arrives in night robes with a taper, much as Othello came to the sleeping Desdemona. Disturbed by the masque, he delivers a long soliloquy, torn between

[74] Barksted's epyllion (1611) shows her defending her honour staunchly, though she is ultimately seduced, becoming a concubine not a wife.

kingly duty and private desire. The *Othello* parallel is stronger still as, drawing back the curtains, Amurath is spurred to a rhapsodic sensory appreciation of his sleeping bride. Desire wins out and he '*makes haste to the Bed*' – at which point Schahin plays his mock-phantom trick. The ploy seems like something from bedroom farce, but I assume that a solemn tone would have been called for, in order to create a convincingly Senecan apparition. The ghost castigates Amurath and curses his marriage: 'may she prove a Strumpet to thy Bed' (597). The king's mind is suddenly flooded with images of Eumorphe coupling with pages, grooms and dwarves. Again, the influence of Shakespeare is felt: Schahin does not have Iago's power of suggestion, but nevertheless we see the same rapid multiplication of sexual personae in the mind of the bridegroom. The liminal phase between vow and consummation is again the time for masculine instability. Here, though, the virgin bride is branded a whore not for what she has supposedly done but for what she *may* do. Amurath calls in his tutor (who has effected a rapid costume change) and his captains to bear witness: 'Gallants, I call you to a spectacle' (642). The term of address here draws in the gentlemen-gallants of the university audience who look on at Goffe's spectacle. Amurath challenges each to say what he would do 'did he find this Jewel in his Bed' (674), and each disingenuously claims that he would freely enjoy her, weighing her far more than empire. In an ironic inversion of power, Amurath's followers steer their unwitting leader into proving his manhood. Deriding them all as 'Milk-sops' (703) – parroting Schahin's word – Amurath proceeds to cut off the sleeping Eumorphe's head, holding it up for each of his captains to kiss in turn. He ghoulishly blazons forth her beauty for a final time, then vows to return to the battlefield to massacre hosts of Christians.

The sensationalistic murder enacts the familiar pun over loss of maidenhead in brutally literal fashion. Eumorphe's nuptial dream is cut unceremoniously short, even if her soul remains, by implication, in Elysium. She is never mentioned again, though the auditors are likely to recall her when an aging Amurath serves as master-of-ceremonies at the wedding of his eldest son, appealing to the gods of marriage for their propitious blessings. What would the university audience (including many young unmarried men) have made of the bedchamber spectacle? It is likely that some, perhaps most, would have been familiar with the story from other sources. These would have known that the Eumorphe-Hiren figure is beheaded – but not in such

circumstances. Earlier versions have her killed publicly, on a state occasion or at a banquet. Here, the private, domestic realm accommodates public execution (opposite to the situation in *The Insatiate Countess*). Goffe's choice of setting shows how the wedding night and bridal chamber had taken hold of the dramatic imagination. Schahin's disguise and dissembling makes for an element of farce, but clearly there is a tragic shock in Amurath's bloody act. Appetitive mimesis draws in the spectators, only to proffer a bloody head to kiss. It is hard to know whether the original spectators would have recoiled in horror, looked on dispassionately, or helplessly guffawed. One thing they are unlikely to have done, I suggest, is wept. The musical dream-sequence was no doubt affecting, but otherwise Eumorphe is little more than an emblem of chastity. Goffe seems less concerned with sentiment than with the bridal-chamber as an arena for debate, highlighting polarities of passion and reason. Schahin enacts a militantly Stoic incursion into Epicurean delight. Amurath ruthlessly represses the latter, proving himself (in a grim pun) 'stoically severed from affection' (653). What is Goffe's position? Schahin, the play's main advocate of the rule of reason (in his Act 1.2 soliloquy) is a villainous abuser of ceremony and innocence. Amurath switches from hierogamous anticipation to expending his displaced manhood in the slaughter of Christians, starting with his virgin bride. Neither Stoics nor Epicureans emerge with credit from this ideological battle on the wedding night.

With the shocking death of Eumorphe, Goffe seems intent on creating the opposite of the *liebestod,* though the matrimonial ideals expressed by the heroine remain unchallenged. These ideals are interrogated, however, in one of the great early modern tragedies, Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (c.1622). The playwrights adapt their main source, like many before them, to situate the tragedy on or around the wedding night.[75] The importance of the consummation is signaled in the opening scene. Within minutes of meeting and falling for Alsemero, Beatrice-Joanna seeks to delay the marriage to Alonzo de Piraquo arranged by her father, Vermandero,[76] claiming that she is unwilling to part with 'the dear companion of my soul,/ Virginity… so rude and suddenly' (1.1.197-9). Yet she is clearly thinking of the bridal chamber in her wish that Alsemero might be there 'When it is done', and is soon

[75] See Bawcutt 1958: xxxi ff. on the sources, especially John Reynolds' *The Triumphs of God's Revenge against… Murther*.
[76] In Reynolds, Beatrice-Joanna is fiercely opposed to the match with Alonzo, whereas in the play she is compliantly engaged. Thus she seems more of a 'changeling' in her affections.

determining how she 'will be sure to keep the night' (1.1.215, 2.1.105). Each of these statements holds a proleptic irony. The wedding night she desires is famously usurped by De Flores, the servant she employs to rid herself of Alonzo. Middleton and Rowley make great theatrical capital out of the murderer's name (a gift from the source).[77] As Peter Womack puts it, 'the play hovers over the moment of deflowering, dramatizing it, travestying it, giving each figure a sinister double so that there are two brides, two bridegrooms, two wedding nights'.[78] A contest over defloration is at the heart of the play's most celebrated scene: only Beatrice-Joanna's virginity will serve as payment for murder. The young noblewoman offers all that she owns to preserve her reputation and her maidenhead – 'Let me go poor unto my bed with honour' (3.4.161) – but De Flores is implacable in claiming the first fruits:

> thy Alsemero,
> Whom (by all sweets that ever darkness tasted),
> If I enjoy thee not, thou ne'er enjoy'st.
> I'll blast the hopes and joys of marriage. 3.4.148-151

As many have noted, De Flores is driven by class resentment as well as sexual mania. The 'stealing joy' scenario envisaged here shares something with the overturning of social hierarchy in *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* and *Othello*. De Flores moves from hapless enamoured servility to ruthless erotic mastery, subverting the courtly assumptions of Beatrice-Joanna, her faith in the 'refulgent virtue' of her love for Alsemero (17), and her attempt to disassociate herself from murder. He claims her as 'the deed's creature', or *servant* (140). But whilst he scorns her claims to modesty – 'Though thou writ'st 'maid', thou whore in thy affection' – he is as desirous as a noble bridegroom of a 'perfect' virginity (120, 145). Beatrice-Joanna thus doubles in the displaced consummation as virgin and whore, reluctantly yielding to De Flores's mock-epithalamic embrace: ''Las how the turtle pants! Thou'lt love anon/ What thou so fear'st and faint'st to look upon' (173-4).[79]

How should this moment be played? Joost Daalder's assertion that Beatrice-Joanna's 'sexual enjoyment is obvious' is at odds with De Flores's interpretation of her panting

[77] The De Flores of the source is besotted with Beatrice-Joanna, who appears to enjoy his attentions. He carries out the murder for a few kisses (they do not become lovers until much later).
[78] Womack 2006: 234.
[79] These lines contain a parodic allusion to Jonson's *Hymenaei* and thus contribute to the play's satire on matrimonial idealism and the epithalamic tradition. See Haber 2009: 87-91.

as a sign of fear.[80] But many others have, like Daalder, argued that behind Beatrice-Joanna's phobic reaction to De Flores lies an unconscious desire.[81] Roberta Barker and David Nicol refute the post-Freudian assumptions of such readings and insist that Beatrice-Joanna is a victim of a rape.[82] She is indeed coerced, blackmailed into submission like Lucrece,[83] yet her sexualized incitement of De Flores to murder raises notions of complicity. A compact is unwittingly formed. The thought prompted by De Flores's first appearance, 'There's scarce a thing but is both loved and loathed' (1.1.125), resonates across the play. Psychological realism is atavistically rooted in traditional plots of the lovely-loathly type, where beauty is revealed as deformity, or *vice versa*. Myths of the Fall are also in play, including the unorthodox tradition that Eve coupled with the serpent: Beatrice-Joanna asks 'Was my creation in the womb so cursed/ It must engender with a viper first' (3.4.168-9).[84] Again we see early modern dramatists reformulating the archetypal incursion on the 'first marriage'. Alsemero's opening soliloquy declares his Edenic hopes of matrimony; he later laments his unhappy fate, 'At my first sight of woman' (5.3.13). There are numerous early hints that there is actually a *third* bridegroom of sorts, that 'Beatrice's passion for Alsemero will be consummated in a 'marriage' to De Flores'.[85] The murder unites them in a surrogate connubial bond, a point pressed home by De Flores: 'we two engaged so jointly'; 'And made you one with me' (3.4.91, 143). The conceit is underlined by the delivery of Alonzo's severed finger wearing its betrothal ring 'stuck/ As if the flesh and it were both one substance' (39-40).[86] It serves as a gruesome but apt love-token for a murderess-bride. Middleton and Rowley symbolise the one-flesh union with mordant humour, as in the earlier dropped glove incident, a sulphurous parody of the courtly trope, where De Flores's fetishistic thrusting of fingers 'into her sockets' (1.1.238) makes for 'a brutal defloratory gesture'.[87] Neither episode is found in the

[80] Daalder 1988: 13.
[81] Eg. Womack 2006: 234, Neill 2006b: xxii.
[82] Barker and Nicol 2004.
[83] Lucrece acquiesces to prevent rather than conceal a murder. See Dolan 2011 for a similar point, and Burks 1995 for an important historical discussion of rape and complicity. Eaton 1984 argues for Beatrice-Joanna as a rape victim, where Lomax 1987 and Paster 2012 consider her complicit.
[84] De Flores is also called a serpent at 1.1.229 and 5.3.66. Frost 1978: 411-15 lists a number of other Edenic motifs. See also Almond 1999: 173-190 on hermeneutic traditions of Eve and the serpent.
[85] Ornstein 1960: 182.
[86] Various critics highlight the parodic nuptial aspects in the play eg. Holdsworth 1990: 263-4; Lomax 1987: 163-4; Neill 1997: 172-3, 187-8; Stachniewski 1990: 238-9.
[87] Holdsworth 1990: 263.

source. The English stage offers numerous proxy consummations, some visceral, some intimate, but none that get quite so insidiously under the skin.

Such grotesqueries have been widely admired, but that has not always been the case with some other newly introduced features, particularly the virginity test and the bed-trick. Writers of tragic nuptial scenarios tend, as we have seen, to push at representational boundaries. *The Changeling*'s main plot shifts towards tragic farce in the final two Acts, an absurdism close to that of the subplot's comical madhouse scenes. Earlier critics tended to decry this switch, but recent criticism has been more tolerant or appreciative on both theatrical and thematic grounds.[88] Not only do the nuptial scenes have a satirical brio, they present crucial stages in Beatrice-Joanna's degeneration. She fears her lost virginity will be discovered on the wedding night, a worse crime in her own eyes than murder: 'He cannot but in justice strangle me/ As I lie by him' (4.1.14-15).[89] Her anxiety is fueled by Alsemero's scholarly understanding.[90] He may have no sexual experience with women,[91] but his books and experiments supposedly make him 'master of the mystery' (39). His comments on the virginity test, however – 'a merry sleight, but true experiment', one that 'ne'er missed, sir,/ Upon a virgin' – mark him less as a serious man of learning than as a juvenile prankster (4.1.45, 4.2.141-2). His initial 'strong faith' (4.1.43) in his bride's purity is misplaced, of course, but evidence-based faith proves no more reliable. Pseudo-scientific discourse is skewered. R. V. Holdsworth itemises the puns in the pregnancy test's 'two spoonfuls of the white water in Glass C' (31): 'in holding up this glass Beatrice is exhibiting an emblem of her own deflowered (and possibly pregnant) condition, for in Jacobean bawdy 'water' meant semen, 'glass' the hymen, and the letter C represented the commonest slang for a woman's genitals'.[92] The virginity test is also comically sexualised, especially in the requirement to 'incontinently gape' (50). Beatrice-Joanna turns the tables on masculine authority, persuading Alsemero of her purity even as she 'symbolically performs the loss of her virginity'.[93] Her

[88] Eg. Schoenbaum 1955: 147, Barker 1958: 130 are scathing but for defences and fuller readings of the scene see McAlindon 1986: 204-7, Holdsworth 1990: 262-3, Neill 1997: 189-9, and Boehrer 1997.
[89] Cf. *Othello* 4.1.206, 'The justice of it pleases'.
[90] Alsemero is a soldier in the source. He remains a man of action in the play but his other interests give scope for the virginity test satire.
[91] This is clear from the opening scene: 'Lover I'm sure y'are none' (1.1.36). Some critics ascribe sexual knowledge to him but this is to mistake his dubious pranks for erotic experience with women.
[92] Holdsworth 1990: 263.
[93] Luttfring 2011: 109. Garber 1994: 25ff reads her performance as a faked orgasm.

ingenuity is compelling; her anxious asides draw us into identification. The stage Vice tradition affords various examples of resourceful villains in a tight spot, but few are female. Whilst the playwrights abandon verisimilitude in these scenes of comic suspense, predicaments over lost virginity were real enough for some women of the era. The wider cultural narrative of marriage included genuine crimes, as in the infamous case of Frances Howard to which the playwrights allude.[94] Their drama, however, is not a matter of mere vilification – spectators may well identify, during these scenes at least, more with the quick-witted 'fair murd'ress' (and her lightsome maid) than with the gulled 'Complete gentleman' (3.4.144, 2.2.3).

Implicitly concerned over other hymeneutic evidence, Beatrice-Joanna proceeds with the bed-trick. Her decision to 'resign/ [Her] first night's pleasure' adds to the chain of nuptial dislocation (4.1.88-9). The wedding night is played for laughs, of a ghoulishly farcical sort. Diaphanta overstays the agreed time; the telescoped clock chimes sound out a restless wait.[95] Beatrice-Joanna fears discovery but also envies her maid's evident pleasure, having had her own 'first fruits' consumed in a mephitic sexual glut. She condemns Diaphanta as a strumpet who 'Makes havoc of my right' (5.1.5); as Swapan Chakravorty observes, the mistress stimulates desires in her servants but resents their 'libidinal autonomy'.[96] Diaphanta's last words foreshadow De Flores's final speech in a tragicomic irony: 'I never made/ So sweet a bargain' (80-1). She is murdered offstage but the action is vividly eroticised through a combination of innuendo and sound effects. The arson ploy in Diaphanta's chamber allows Beatrice-Joanna a verbal revenge, playing on the vaginal implications of 'lodging chamber' and 'in her chamber negligent and heavy' (101, 104). 'Chimney' is likewise a *double entendre*, alongside the phallic 'piece', in the plan to shoot Diaphanta with 'a piece high-charged,/ As 'twere to cleanse the chimney' (45-6). Her moment of death is explosively sounded when '*The piece goes off*', prompting Vermandero's excitable (and again sexualised) praise of De Flores: 'Ha, there he goes' (95).[97] The playhouse shakes to a deadly priapic power. This gleefully sadistic nuptial farce still allows for psychological insight, as felt in the spectral passage of Alonzo's ghost, and in Beatrice-Joanna's new dependency on De Flores as a 'beauteous' and 'wondrous

[94] See Luttfring 2011, and Bromham and Bruzzi 1990: 20ff.
[95] Cf. Heywood's variation on this scene for the bed-trick in *A Maidenhead Well Lost*.
[96] Chakravorty 1996: 159.
[97] I have argued elsewhere for a sodomitical subtext here – Blamires 2012.

necessary man' (71, 92). Her question 'who would not love him?' (70) invites complicit agreement with abjection and malice.

Middleton and Rowley test moral certainties over love and marriage. Various Jacobean tragedies – Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, Dekker's *The Noble Spanish Soldier*, and Middleton's own *The Lady's Tragedy*, for instance – present 'true' and 'false' alternative spouses. Which is which is usually plain. We can have no such confidence when it comes to *The Changeling*, though, as can be seen in the swift and overdetermined denouement. The hard-won triumph of the illicit lovers is nullified the very next day – still part of the wedding celebration – when Beatrice-Joanna is espied kissing her 'lip's saint' in the garden (5.3.53). The serpent is now her courtly paramour. She confesses to murder but proclaims her chastity, swearing by the bridal bed she has not shared:

> BEATRICE Remember I am true to your bed.
> ALSEMERO The bed itself's a charnel, the sheets shrouds
> For murdered carcasses. 5.3.82-4

No bed appears in *The Changeling* but the playwrights emphasise its tragic associations. When Beatrice-Joanna finally confesses to the bed-trick and the murder of Diaphanta, the bed stands metonymically for Alsemero: 'Your bed was cozened on the nuptial night,/ For which your false-bride died' (160-1). This implies a 'true-bride', but Beatrice-Joanna fulfils this role for neither Alsemero nor Alonzo. Does she for De Flores? Thrust into Alsemero's closet, Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores are urged to 'rehearse again/ [Their] scene of lust' (114-5) ahead of future performances in hell. Do they take Alsemero at his directorial word and engage in a final act of adultery only just offstage? If so, is Beatrice-Joanna a willing participant, or is she raped at knife point? These matters are indeterminate, though Beatrice-Joanna's 'O, O, O!' (139) as she is stabbed are often assumed to be the '*shrill cryings*' of both love and death.

Another indeterminate matter is what De Flores means by 'token' as he takes his own life:

> Make haste, Joanna, by that token to thee:
> Canst not forget, so lately put in mind,

I would not go to leave thee far behind. 5.3.175-7

Editors invariably gloss 'token' as De Flores's self-inflicted wound, but a few critics have wondered if it refers to the diamond betrothal ring.[98] This notion has its merits. The ring was Beatrice-Joanna's 'first token' to Alonzo and his 'last token' to her (3.4.35, 37); De Flores gives it – 'I've a token for thee' (27) – in exchange for the jewel of virginity. 'So lately put in mind' might suggest that an *earlier* love-token has been recalled, perhaps by a deathly one-flesh union in the closet. Alonzo's ghost drew attention to his missing finger. Might De Flores signal, by means of a hand gesture, a phallic meaning here too? Whether the ring-finger or a wound is intended by 'token', the implication is clear either way: De Flores claims Beatrice-Joanna as his wife in 'a marriage of like and lost souls'.[99] She dies within a couplet of him. Theirs seems a predestined diabolical union, the hierogamy of the damned.

The close of *The Changeling* offers stoic comfort after a purge of natural born sinners. According to some older critics, moral order is restored. Recent commentators have argued for an open-ended view of the tragedy, however, pointing out the compromised morality and homosocial complacencies of Vermandero and Alsemero in particular. The uncomprehending detachment with which tragic events are 'blotted out' (5.3.182) has led some to side with the play's *fleurs du mal*. De Flores's voracious passion – 'I loved this woman in spite of her heart' (165) – has a darkly romantic power. Nicholas Brooke remarks that Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores 'go to hell together more perfect in their corruption than the dubiously honourable figures they leave behind'.[100] Such readings are available because inverted generic signs (anti-courtly, anti-epithalamic) turn a murderous union into the play's 'true' marriage. The decision to structure the play around the wedding night is a crucial one as well, of course. In most of the works considered so far in this study, newlywed or betrothed lovers are threatened or destabilised by malign external forces. Isabella in *The Insatiate Countess* ruins her own nuptials without seductive or tyrannous prompting, but even she repents, embracing a normative chaste marriage as a bride-of-death. Beatrice-Joanna asks Alsemero for forgiveness, but there is no hint of 'new-married in

[98] Eg. Kehler 1967 and Holdsworth 1990; Daalder 1991: 227 arbitrarily dismisses the notion as 'arbitrary'.
[99] McAlindon 1986: 203.
[100] Brooke 1979: 79. See also Ornstein 1960: 189-90 and Morrison 1983.

death' reconciliation here. Middleton and Rowley are not necessarily of the devil's party in all this. The decision to represent Spanish perfidy seems to have been political – a specific response to King James's 'Spanish Match' strategy – rather than rooted in general cynicism about matrimonial ideals. Both playwrights promote the latter often enough elsewhere. But *The Changeling* seems to offer a sceptical take on love-deaths of the sacramental or sentimental variety. Some critics argue that its denouement re-enacts or parodies the endings of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*;[101] these are major precursors, certainly, but I prefer to see the anti-*liebestod* here as a reflection on the wider tradition of the 'sweet married death'.[102] As a work roughly contemporaneous with *The Fatal Marriage*, it could be seen as a pungent corrective to the prevailing lachrymose mode. Perhaps the playwrights had the marriage-and-martyrdom plays of Fletcher and his collaborators (discussed in the next chapter) in their satirical sights when they conjured a *liebestod* of such unhallowed eroticism.

[101] Haber 2009: 102, and Neill 1997: 171, 197, respectively.
[102] Heywood, *Edward IV Pt. 2*, 5.2.

CHAPTER 6

Wedding Night Martyrs in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon

'Tragic wedding' designs, with their inversions of epithalamic tropes and their delayed or displaced consummations, lie behind some of the strangest and most affecting sequences in Jacobean drama. The playwrights who, along with Shakespeare and Marston, did most to establish the theatregram were Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, in particular with the enormous success of *The Maid's Tragedy* (c.1610), one of most influential plays of the seventeenth century. Its impact can be seen not only in the work of fellow playwrights but also in the tragic and tragicomic variations of the subsequent Beaumont and Fletcher canon, which includes Fletcher's solo work and collaborations with other dramatists. Several critics have remarked upon the number of 'disastrous', 'abortive' or 'subverted' wedding nights in Fletcher's oeuvre in particular,[1] but these scenarios have not been identified as part of a wider convention. I concentrate, for the most part, on two tragedies, *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Tragedy of Thierry and Theodoret*,[2] both of which are structured around a cruelly postponed consummation.

Before turning to an analysis of the two plays, I will briefly address what we know of their reception. Beaumont and Fletcher's early plays for the King's Men were phenomenally successful.[3] Their emotive impact is attested to in many of the commendatory verses for the 1647 first Folio. Robert Herrick, looking back on the playgoing of his youth, writes of how thousands flocked to performances that raised 'full astonishment', having the 'power to move/ Young men to swoone, and maides to dye for love' (xlvii) in associative sympathy with the onstage action.[4] For Thomas Palmer, Fletcherian tragedy induced such passionate identification that playgoers 'Who only came to see, turn'd Actors too' (lvi). These commendations, written in

[1] Leech 1962: 142, Pearse 1973: 21, and Clark 1994: 38, respectively.
[2] Delayed or displaced consummations are put to tragic or (more often) tragicomic use in plays such as *A Wife for a Month*, *The Custom of the Country*, *The Night Walker*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, *The Queen of Corinth*, *The Double Marriage*, and *The Prophetess*.
[3] Gurr 1969: xlv and 2004: 198-201.
[4] Page references to Dyce edition.

time of civil war, are markedly nostalgic and in some cases make use of standard encomiastic tropes.[5] There is no reason to doubt their general veracity, however – there were sound commercial principles, after all, behind Fletcher following Shakespeare as the lead playwright for the King's Men, London's pre-eminent company. *The Maid's Tragedy* was often singled out for acclaim. Herrick praises the role of Evadne in two separate poems.[6] Others highlight the impact of Aspatia: 'And when *Aspasia* wept, not any eye/ But seem'd to wear the same sad livery' (xxix).[7] Davenant's Caroline-era prologue to the *The Woman Hater* addresses women in the audience, excusing Fletcher from possible charges of misogyny by reminding them that the dramatist: [8]

> to the Stars, your Sex did raise;
> For which, full Twenty yeares, he wore the Bayes.
> 'Twas he reduc'd *Evandra* [Evadne] from her scorne,
> And taught the sad *Aspacia* how to mourne; 23-26.

I know of no early recorded responses to *Thierry and Theodoret*, though the Q1 title-page states that it was 'diverse times acted' at the Blackfriars;[9] the fact that it was selected for publication after the 'big three' Beaumont and Fletcher plays, *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, and *A King and No King*, suggests that it was initially held just below them in terms of interest or esteem.[10]

As some of the paratextual material implies, the early performances of Beaumont and Fletcher's work generated a significant emotional intensity amongst playgoers of both sexes. Plots showing the amatory crises of lovers at the point of transition to adulthood seem to have had a particular appeal, similar to that exerted by *Romeo and Juliet* in the 1590s. They spoke to the insecurities of an age in which marriage was, on the one hand, an article of religious and humanist faith, but, on the other hand, coming under ideological pressure, particularly in educated and aristocratic circles, as new

[5] See Moison 2002 and Steggle 2007: 90-93.
[6] His Folio verse and in 'The Apparition of his Mistress Calling him to Elysium'.
[7] Thomas Stanley; Edmund Waller's commendatory poem praises 'Aspatia weeping in her gown' (xxiv); Lovelace also highlights '*bright* Aspatia's *woes*' in a prefatory verse to *The Wild-Goose Chase* (Bowers edition).
[8] Q2 of 1649, but first published 1638. Davenant treats Fletcher as the sole author of a play now usually assigned mainly to Beaumont.
[9] The Q2 prologue of 1649 notes that that the play had previously been in fashion, though the same prologue is also used for *The Noble Gentleman*.
[10] See Wooding 2016: 83-4 on the quarto publications.

strains of libertinism and scepticism emerged. The joys of marriage were endlessly promoted in an epithalamic boom, but they were by no means guaranteed. Dramatists contributed to both the hype and the cynicism in dialogic wedding night tragedies. Beaumont and Fletcher explore doctrine as well as desire within their 'delayed consummation' designs. As affective structures, the plays are indebted to Shakespeare and Marston, but they are also strikingly original. An 'improbable hypothesis' is employed to create shocks and quandaries.[11] Although the protagonists are placed in extreme predicaments, the plays offer 'their audience fictional versions of their own experience'.[12] As I go on to argue, a good deal of psychological insight emerges from these outré situations. I also make the case that Beaumont and Fletcher's wedding night tragedies are significant in shaping a new kind of hagiography, one requiring fresh icons in the form of matrimonial (and erotic) martyrs.

'ARE THESE THE JOYS OF MARRIAGE?': EROTIC DISPLACEMENT IN *THE MAID'S TRAGEDY*

Much of Beaumont and Fletcher's huge success with the King's Men was, according to Andrew Gurr, founded on 'redeploying Shakespearean elements'.[13] T. W. Craik points to the influence of *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar* and *Othello* on several features of *The Maid's Tragedy*, though he argues that, of these, only the *Hamlet* associations are 'essential' rather than 'technical'.[14] The fact that both *Othello* and *The Maid's Tragedy* contain a scene in which a sleeper is awakened and murdered in bed is counted as one of the more superficial resemblances; this, however, is to miss an 'essential' connection between the plays as wedding night tragedies structured around a delayed consummation. It is likely that *The Maid's Tragedy* was written after the successful revival of *Othello* in 1610.[15] Roslyn Knutson's studies of the King's Men repertory reveal the company's commercial acumen in exploiting hit formulas. Plays

[11] Waith 1952: 38.
[12] Bliss 2002: 537.
[13] Gurr 2004: 198.
[14] Craik 1988: 7.
[15] The revival was in spring; *The Maid's Tragedy* is usually thought to belong to later 1610 or early 1611. *Othello* was revived again in 1612-13, attesting to its success in 1610.

concerning 'chastity and revenge', she suggests, were popular in the 1610-13 period.[16] Were Beaumont and Fletcher commissioned to write something in this mode? If so, it is tempting to imagine them in conversation with the company's lead playwright, focussing on the constructional formula that delivers so powerful a tragic climax in *Othello*. Whilst the younger playwrights had other possible models – the love-versus-honour tests and displaced consummations in Marston and Dekker, say[17] – the timing of the *Othello* revival is suggestive. It is worth noting as well that the later Shakespeare and Fletcher collaboration, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613-14), makes significant use of 'broken nuptials' plotting – as indeed their collaboration on the lost play *Cardenio* (1612-13) would have done.[18] There seems to me a fair likelihood that 'tragic wedding' conventions – structural, rhetorical, emblematic – were a topic for discussion amongst the King's Men dramatists.

The wedding night is foregrounded in *The Maid's Tragedy* in an overt and unforgettable manner. Its delayed consummation structure has been recognised in disparate critical studies; what follows is an attempt to collate some of the more perceptive readings and to make additional points with regard to the playwrights' structural, verbal and semiotic craft. The play centres on the union of Amintor and Evadne, an aristocratic marriage arranged by the King of Rhodes. At first glance, the opening is notable for what Martin Wiggins calls 'the sheer normality of the situation',[19] namely the bustling excitement at court in the run-up to a wedding masque. This is not to say that there is no unease or dissension. The King, it is implied, has put match-making policies ahead of soldierly priorities, thus jeopardizing an ongoing military campaign. Yet the marriage is presented, initially, as a way of honouring the returned war hero, Melantius, Evadne's brother and Amintor's great friend. Melantius acknowledges the honour but is perturbed at having been kept in the dark over the match – a policy that leads to his dreadful *faux pas* in greeting the wrong woman, Aspatia, as the bride. She is described as the 'troth-plight wife to Amintor' in the character list, but we learn that the engagement was broken off at the King's behest. This breach of legal contract and social decorum not only wounds

[16] Knutson 1999: 360. There was a spate of wedding night plays at this juncture, both tragic and comic.
[17] A critical focus on the 'poets' war' has tended to obscure the romantic plot of Dekker's *Satiromastix*, a 'tragic wedding' design with an innovative tragicomic reversal.
[18] See Hammond 2010 on *Double Falsehood*, an eighteenth-century play perhaps based on *Cardenio*.
[19] Wiggins 1998: xvii.

Aspatia, but also stirs up long-standing factional tensions between Melantius and Calianax, Aspatia's father – the last thing an astute political marriage should do. Yet when the King appears his first gesture is to promote peace between the rancorous parties; the lavish entertainment he provides seems that of a benign well-wisher. There are question marks, then, over the King's political and moral judgement but nothing at this stage to suggest that he is a tyrant, lustful or otherwise.

Act 1 culminates in an extended masque which has received significant critical attention for its structural and thematic importance. An audacious piece of staging, it must have put the audience in mind of the extravagant wedding entertainments commissioned at the Jacobean court. The section contains more lines than the genuine court masque written by Beaumont in 1613.[20] It is given unusual prominence in taking up so much stage time before most of the characters have been fully introduced. The dramatists play with generic expectations: court entertainments had been used to sensationally violent effect in revenge tragedy from *The Spanish Tragedy* onwards, or had at least, in tragicomic variations, seen lovers come under threat.[21] This one passes off, however, without a hitch. The court masque was meant to conjure or restore harmony – social, political, cosmological – and that appears to be exactly what occurs, dissipating the edgy familial and factional undercurrents of the opening. There are no plots, no travesties, no deaths; there are no overtly broken nuptials of any kind. And yet the masque has a sophisticated structural and symbolic purpose, as various critics have demonstrated, notably Michael Neill, who draws attention to the inversion of epithalamic tropes and the ways in which the masque initiates a nuptial night that 'will never be consummated, except in death'.[22]

I will not dwell on how the masque itself prefigures this erotic displacement, other than to note the phallic detumescence hinted at when a storm is unleashed: 'ere day/ Many a tall ship will be cast away' (1.2.257-8). All three of the epithalamic songs in the masque contain the standard hope that the night will be a long one. The second lyric, which focuses on the bride's first sexual experience, supplies phrases for the title of my study:

[20] *The Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn* (1613).
[21] Cf. the masque-like wedding procession of Beaumont and Fletcher's previous play, *Philaster*, which ends in a threat of execution.
[22] Neill 1970: 118. See also Gossett 1972 and Shullenberger 1982: 134-40.

Stay gentle Night, and with thy darkeness cover
The kisses of her lover;
Stay, and confound her tears and her shrill cryings,
Her weak denials, vows, and often-dyings;
Stay, and hide all,
But not help though she call. (1.2.235-40)

The assumption is that once the virgin bride's initial reluctance ('*weak denials*') and pain ('*shrill cryings*') are overcome, she will win through to an intense pleasure, with the phrase '*often-dyings*' punning, familiarly enough, on the sexual climax as a death. The personified figure of Night is asked not to intervene, whatever cries emerge from the nuptial chamber. A prurient focus on the defloration is by no means unusual in nuptial verse, and here any indelicacy is softened by the tender ruling imperative: '*Stay gentle Night*'. The lyric acquires a very different tone in retrospect, however. Beaumont and Fletcher realise the ominous potential within benevolent generic motifs: the darkness that can '*hide all*' becomes sinister, the licit lover turns illicit, and the lack of help for one who calls is suddenly no laughing matter. Jests turn darkly proleptic: the wedding night will indeed be excruciatingly prolonged and each of the play's romantic protagonists will undergo an eroticised death. The anticipated '*shrill cryings*' and '*often-dyings*' are ultimately those of tragedy.

Dula, a court lady, takes a similar fescinnine licence when undressing the bride in the following scene, drawing on the 'amorous battle' motif: 'The wars are nak'd that you must make tonight' (2.1.2). As with the pre-nuptial banter in Marston's *Sophonisba*, subtle puns such as Evadne's 'I am soon undone' (8) are woven into the naturalistic detail. A ribald spirit seems to prevail, but the playwrights disturb the mood, raising erotic uncertainty, by including Aspatia as another attendant, a mournful, initially silent, counterpart to Dula. The contrast between wanton and chaste is stark. Evadne appears to embody a Marstonian 'modest amorousness', steering a course between her two attendants: 'Methinks a mean betwixt you would do well' (36). She inclines more toward Dula's liveliness, requesting a bawdy libertine ditty to counteract Aspatia's pointed singing of a lovelorn dirge. But Evadne also declares pity for Aspatia from the bedchamber threshold. Again, only in retrospect do we understand the scene: how Evadne dissembles as a modest bride, and how Aspatia and Dula outwardly embody her inner struggle, the virgin-whore psychomachia that plays out in what ensues.

The dramatists not only give a twist to the role of the expectant bride, they play with Aspatia's generic function as the 'forsaken virgin' (1.1.105).[23] Melantius's 'Hail, maid and wife!' (58) greeting establishes her as a-bride-and-no-bride, the liminal figure of romance tradition, trapped in limbo between vow and consummation. The self-conscious quality of her suffering has often been noted; Alexander Leggatt calls her 'an artist in grief'.[24] Her laments are studied, ritualistic and ostentatious, particularly in the famous death-wish fantasia of Act 2.2, with its roll-call of legendary betrayed women. The playwrights supply Aspatia with weeping waiting-women to underline the infectious nature of her sorrow, a gambit that clearly worked in tugging at the heartstrings of playhouse audiences. Whilst the Aspatia role was widely admired at first, various critics have since taken against a perceived she-tragedy sentimentalism, starting with Thomas Rymer: 'Pretty Lamb! how mournfully it bleats!'.[25] Aspatia's sweetly plaintive complaint does indeed border on the cloying, but she is far more bitter over male treachery than is usually acknowledged. She reworks the story of Theseus and Ariadne to bring down a vengeful heavenly justice on the perjured hero (2.2.40ff). Her whole bearing is a reproach, rooted in thwarted desire. Preparing the bride, Aspatia is outspoken about what 'should have been/ My night [Q1 right]' as 'a spotless offering/ To young Amintor's bed' (2.1.44-7). She wishes Evadne 'all the marriage joys/ That longing maids imagine in their beds' but offers to teach her 'an artificial way to grieve' should her marriage fail (90-1, 95). The affective impact of the role is greater for these resentful undercurrents, and for her self-overhearing capacity, an artistic consciousness of how deeply conventional a role she is playing. What are there but customary emblems for lovelorn women – flowers to 'strow her over', or a 'willow garland' to wear (1.1.96; 2.1.120)? Not unlike her dramaturgical creators, Aspatia seeks something more original, a form that admits a more complex range of emotions than the standard 'mirrors of modesty' motifs.[26] Hence her departure to 'try/ Some yet unpractised way to grieve and die' (2.1.124).

[23] Huebert 1977: 607-10 discusses her as a prime example of the 'forsaken woman' who featured so prominently on the Jacobean and Caroline stage.
[24] Leggatt 1988: 205.
[25] Rymer 1678: 123. Leech 1962: 126 finds Aspatia 'wearisome'.
[26] See Pearse 1973, especially Chaps. 4 and 5, on representations of chaste women in the era.

These words are spoken to Amintor at a moment of ritual resonance. Evadne has retired to the bridal chamber; the bridegroom, on arrival in the antechamber is handed a torch by the ladies-in-waiting to help 'find her in the dark' (110). The torch is, as we have seen, a major emblem in both the epithalamic tradition and its tragic obverse. Amintor holds it aloft as Aspatia utters a recriminatory blessing and demands a parting kiss, a right she 'will not be denied' (116). Amintor's subsequent soliloquy sees him torn on a bigamous threshold, between the departure of one wife and the arrival of another; I imagine an ominous intensity to the original performances, with portentous shadows cast by the torch across the Blackfriars stage.[27] Amintor recognises his guilty conduct, but tries to play down its magnitude: 'I only brake a promise,/ And 'twas the King that forced me' (135-6). His body, however, will not let him off the hook: 'Methinks I feel/ Her grief shoot suddenly through all my veins' (127-8). Jason Denman highlights a pattern of such imagery in the play, drawing out its sexual implications: 'Oddly enough, if Amintor's wedding night is a dismal instance of coitus pre-emptus, there is a sort of strange consummation between him and Aspatia, whose grief is itself penetrative'.[28] Erotic suspense is heightened. The kiss leaves Amintor with his 'Timorous flesh' trembling and an intuitive sense of foreboding: 'Something whispers me,/ Go not to bed' (132-3, 136). Though he attempts to take the manly lead with Evadne – 'To bed my love; Hymen will punish us/ For being slack performers of his rites' (143-4) – we might wonder about his ability to perform even before the trauma he endures.

That kiss turns out to be more than passes between Amintor and Evadne on their nuptial night. In the famous duologue that follows, Evadne reveals that the marriage is a sham; that she is not a virgin but rather the King's mistress; and that Amintor must, according to the King's absolutist decree, play the compliant cuckold in an unconsummated marriage. The sheer perversity of the nuptial inversion is shocking enough but it is Evadne's frank carnality and witheringly imperious manner that has the greatest force. She challenges Amintor's callow assumptions with what Ian Fletcher calls a 'nihilizing clarity of mind'.[29] The virginal Amintor moves from

[27] The playhouse mentioned on the Q1 title-page (there were probably performances at the Globe too). My experience of watching *The Duchess of Malfi* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* at the Sam Wanamaker playhouse attests to the atmospheric intensity created by candle and lantern light in domestic scenes.
[28] Denman 2005: 319.
[29] Fletcher 1967: 35

bewilderment to impotent rage to doomed resignation, adopting a series of classic male attitudes, from the idealizing and courtly to the violently misogynous. His protean squirming ends in an emasculated defeatism, shattered by his bride's intransigence. The scene's best-known line stems from Amintor's initial attempt to rationalize the situation: his suggestion that Evadne innocently hopes to preserve her 'maidenhead a night' is met with the loftily sardonic put-down 'A maidenhead, Amintor,/ At my years? (2.1.193-5). This line taps into widespread cynicism about the depravity of courts in general and the Jacobean court in particular.[30] The latter was, of course, where matrimonial idealism was hitting new heights in a plethora of wedding verses and masques. Such glorification of the spousal bond lies behind Amintor's wounded question:

> Are these the joys of marriage? Hymen, keep
> This story, that will make succeeding youth
> Neglect thy ceremonies, from all ears 2.1.215-17.

Beaumont and Fletcher play an ironic game with Amintor's hymeneal faith – the story that should remain private is acted out on the public stage. If word should get out about his marriage, Amintor continues, libertine lawlessness will rule. His situation is extreme, yet it mirrors one aspect of what Lawrence Stone calls the 'crisis of the aristocracy', in that marital breakdown among the elite was rife in the era.[31] Amintor, we later learn, spends a sleepless night on the floor beside the bed in which Evadne sleeps soundly. The lack of '*shrill cryings*' and '*often-dyings*' makes the post-nuptial joshing – 'Dula swears/ She heard you cry two rooms off' (3.1.91-2) – both hilarious and poignant. Act 2.1 of *The Maid's Tragedy* is a milestone in the development of a tragic wedding theatregram. Amintor's further question, 'Was ever such a marriage night as this?' (242) is, first and foremost, a naturalistic response to an improbable situation, but it can also be heard as a declaration of theatrical originality, a throwing down of the generic gauntlet.

The play's subverted nuptial night has long been acknowledged a *coup de théâtre*. Acclaim for striking individual scenes in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon has often been accompanied, however, by complaints over a general lack of moral seriousness

[30] See Lindley 1993: Chap. 2 on the perception of lax sexual morality at the court of James I.
[31] Stone 1965.

and artistic integrity. The 'trivialisation of tragedy' has been laid at the playwrights' door.[32] The wedding night scenario in *The Maid's Tragedy* has been attacked for speciosity and implausibility. Whilst the basic motive – to 'cover shame' in the event of pregnancy (2.1.338) – is seen as credible, some have felt that the choice of Amintor as a dupe beggars belief. When an incredulous Amintor himself asks why he was singled out, he is informed that Evadne refused to marry a fool, and that the King believed him to be 'honest' (ie. loyal), a young man with faith in the divinity of kings (3.1.262). As Craik notes, Amintor's 'very virtues have undone him'.[33] Thomas Rymer, writing in the later seventeenth century, pours scorn, however, on the notion that the King would select an honest, valiant man 'to be the pimp to his bride'.[34] William Archer similarly dismisses the ploy as an absurdity: 'It is simply to invite disaster'.[35] Archer notoriously writes off most Renaissance drama against the yardstick of Ibsenesque naturalism. But how preposterous is Beaumont and Fletcher's plot? The King's ruse is reckless, to say the least: Amintor himself angrily rejects his offer of wealth and libertine freedom, and the scheme is almost immediately exposed when Melantius sees through Amintor's post-nuptial dissembling (a scene of naturalistic brilliance). The playwrights make it abundantly clear, however, that the King is anything but a cunning machiavel. His jealous suspicions of Amintor suggest that the plan has been implemented with little thought to consequences. It is a gamble, a sadistic game. The tyrant takes a twisted pleasure in tormenting Amintor with *double entendres*. We hear a report of the King and Evadne in collusive hysterics: 'I thought their spleens would break; they laughed us all/ Out of the room' (3.2.363-4). These are not the behaviours of a cautious strategist, but a cocooned, impulsive chancer for whom the risk is part of the thrill. The wedding night scheme is far-fetched, to be sure, but it is grounded in considered and credible detail.

The effectiveness of Amintor as a tragic hero has also often been questioned. How can someone so palpably dishonourable be subjected to a tragic test of honour? The play seems to demand empathy and even some admiration for him, despite his unworthy rejection of Aspatia,[36] his shabby capitulation, and his kneejerk royalism. It seems to

[32] Salgādo 1980: 123-7.
[33] Craik 1988: 26.
[34] Rymer 1678: 108
[35] Archer 1990: 66.
[36] Bowers 1940: 173 notes that this is 'a crime which in tragedy could not go unrequited'.

me that just such an ambivalent response towards Amintor is what the playwrights are seeking. He is a naïve and virginal youth lured into an erotic trap; his eyes are opened on his wedding night to an adult world of dark sexual intrigue; he clings in his humiliation to whatever shreds of faith remain, beseeching the 'powers above' for guidance on how to 'bear himself, and save his honour' (2.1.243-5). Later, reaching for his sword, he threatens to kill the King as 'a mere man', but is cowed by a 'Divinity… that strikes dead/ My rising passions' (3.1.236-40). The phallic implications here are reinforced in a series of further scenes in which he draws and sheaths his sword,[37] torn between vengefully murdering and dutifully defending the King. Amintor is the nation's bright martial hope as well as its chief romantic catch, but the mock-marriage sends him into a crisis of masculinity, impotent on both fronts. He continues to vacillate until finally called upon to use his sword at the tragic close – the fulfilment, as we shall see, of the delayed consummation schema. Amintor, it should be said, is not solely made up of exaggerated passions and rabid attitudinizing. After the wedding night debacle, his introspective asides carry particular force. His plaintive 'For aught I know, all husbands are like me' (3.2.49) gives profound voice to private doubts and fears at a time of sweeping matrimonial idealism; and his memory of Evadne's sweet breath as he 'laid [his] lips to hers' (3.1.37) whilst she slept soundly on the bridal bed is a haunting image of displaced desire.[38]

This characterlogical depth is bolstered by the playwrights' taut handling of dramatic structure. The tragic wedding conception comes through with resounding force in the violent denouement. The scene in which Evadne, having gone from scornful voluptuary to guilt-wracked penitent, enacts her murderous revenge on the King is, as Neill observes, an 'ironical inversion' and 'grotesque travesty' of a wedding night.[39] The King had earlier banqueted Amintor and Evadne, calling the former 'yet a bridegroom' and cruelly teasing him about a desire to 'be abed again' (4.2.43, 222). The bed was kept offstage for the actual wedding night but in the murder scene it is the focal point of the love-death action – another example of the breakthrough in representing intimacy so integral to the tragic wedding theatregram. Evadne steals to

[37] Ornstein 1960: 176 highlights the 'recurrent phallic symbolism' of the swords. See also Leech 1962: 123, Denman 2005: 321-2, and Velissariou 2016: 283-5. Melantius's weapon has phallic implications too, notably in the incestuous threat 'This sword shall be thy lover' (4.1.98).
[38] Cf. *Othello* 5.2.15-20.
[39] Neill 1970: 124-5.

the King's chamber and ties his arms to the bedposts as he sleeps; on waking, he comically assumes that a sexual game is intended: 'What pretty new device is this, Evadne?' (5.1.47). Sandra Clark observes the murder 'in the bed they have shared mingles eroticism and sadism' and culminates in a 'ritualistic (and perhaps orgasmic) wounding sequence'.[40] Rebecca Bushnell suggests that the King 'is in essence raped by Evadne'.[41] Evadne refers to the stabbings as 'love-tricks' (104), and repeatedly links the blood-letting to her own lost virginity. When Melantius first confronts her as 'a glorious whore', forcing a confession and repentance at sword-point, the crime of defloration is repeatedly stressed: the King must die, having stolen Evadne's (and by extension her family's) 'wealth', and having 'of a lovely rose, left thee a canker' (4.1.70, 86, 166). Whilst Evadne is roundly condemned for her wickedness, both Melantius and Amintor are clear where the real blame lies: 'that devil King tempted thy frailty' (4.1.263). Evadne later curses the 'temptations on temptations' she faced (5.1.81). The play takes a strongly didactic turn as she calls for aid from 'all you spirits of abusèd Ladies', and declares 'Let no woman dare/ From this hour be disloyal' (4.1.168; 5.1.15-16). Evadne is a cautionary exemplum, the monstrously polluted woman seeking, with 'the conscience/ Of a lost virgin' (5.1.12-13), to expiate her sins. Such overt pointing of the moral – 'a staple in the fiction and drama of chastity'[42] – has often been found intrusive, but the playwrights certainly seem to have created empathy for Evadne in playgoers such as Herrick and Davenant.

Some critics have been less than convinced by the retrospective framing of Evadne as the victim of a tyrant's lust. How wronged is she? Rymer is curmudgeonly in his assessment, finding the regicide wholly unjustified since Evadne was not raped: she commits a deadly sin to punish a venial one.[43] (This is pretty much Amintor's position within the play.) Leech suggests that 'as we had not previously thought of the King as Evadne's seducer, her readiness to kill him appears somewhat arbitrary', whilst Clark considers her a self-determining woman who displays 'sexual authority' and who 'willingly colluded in her own corruption'.[44] Evadne is certainly frank about power as

[40] Clark 1994: 113. Cf. the revenge of Gabriella in *The Triumph of Death*.
[41] Bushnell 1990: 166n37.
[42] Pearse 1973: 176.
[43] Rymer 1678: 115.
[44] Leech 1962: 123; Clark 1994: 104, 109-10.

an aphrodisiac: 'I love with my ambition,/ Not with my eyes' (3.1.174-5);[45] she takes pride in the King's sexual thraldom to her, even taunting him with this at 3.1.180-2. It may seem hard to square so worldly a woman with her later homiletic self, but the dramatists show different sides to her character throughout. Even as a penitent there remains a visceral eroticism to her, an aspect memorably captured in Swinburne's phrase 'the murderess-Magdalen'.[46] Earlier in the play she is scornful and calculating, but nevertheless capable of pity towards both Amintor and Aspatia.[47] I would point as well to a little discussed (and still less understood) aspect of the wedding night exchange, Evadne's demand that Amintor act as her champion in killing a man, as yet unspecified, who has wronged her:

> Now I shall try thy truth. If thou dost love me,
> Thou weighst not anything compared with me;
> Life, honour, joys eternal…
> Wilt thou kill this man?
> Swear, my Amintor, and I'll kiss the sin
> Off from thy lips. 2.1.173-181

Critics have mistaken this for a jest, or even as a necrophilic demand for Amintor's suicide.[48] Evadne, however, is engaged in a double ploy, simultaneously advancing and subverting the King's plan. She later reminds the King of a vow that, should he fall, she would 'bend to him/ That won your throne' (3.1.173-4). On the threshold of the bridal-chamber, Evadne offers Amintor sexual fulfilment as a reward for political usurpation. His refusal to commit blindly to this proposal earns her contempt and she reverts to the original scheme which keeps her as the King's mistress. But the revolutionary implications of what she has asked should not be missed.[49] Whilst she is shocked by Melantius's later demand that she herself should kill the King, the thought of regicide is not new to her. Evadne's final contempt for the King does not come out of the blue, then, but is felt as an undercurrent throughout. The sexual politics of the wedding night scene are even more radical than is usually recognised.

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[45] There are parallels with Bianca in Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, though Evadne has, it seems, been seduced rather than raped.
[46] Swinburne 1897: 65.
[47] See 2.1.107 and 329.
[48] Eg. Ornstein 1960: 175-6; Danby 1952: 190-1; Huebert 1977: 606.
[49] Note the contrast with Melantius's later rebellion which is excused on the grounds that it is not a coup fired by personal ambition.

The continued inversion of the wedding night is felt in Evadne's dealings with Amintor in the final two acts. Seeking his forgiveness in Act 4.1, a contrite wife in the mould of Heywood's Jane Shore and Anne Frankford, she goes on her knees to him, her eroticized saviour: 'I am hell,/ Till you, my dear lord, shoot your light into me/ The beams of your forgiveness' (4.1.231-3).[50] Delighted at her remorse, Amintor promises to 'know' her as a wife, a word he immediately qualifies, denying any biblical implication: 'my embraces must be far from thee' (265, 270). Her corrupt state when 'The holy priest… gave our hands together' (274) cannot be forgotten; his parting kiss is of sexual renunciation. Evadne has other ideas though, having vowed to murder the King: his death, she believes, will 'wash her stains away' (282), reconfiguring her as a virgin. When she returns to Amintor in the final scene, '*her hands bloody, with a knife*' (sd.5.3.105), she suggests that she has undergone a purification ritual. With her hair unbound, as worn by brides,[51] she reminds him of 'When our hands met before the holy man' and claims now to be made 'beauteous with these rites' (117, 119). She brings Amintor the 'joys' that were stolen, having committed the murder as 'a way/ To meet thy love' (107, 137-8). Evadne appears to Amintor, by contrast, not as a virginal innocent, but as a ghoul, mired in even greater sin.[52] Horrified at the regicide – a repudiation that protects the dramatists, perhaps – he rejects her, a neat reversal of the wedding night scene. Evadne begs 'Forgive me then/ And take me to thy bed' (150-1), clinging to him in a frantic farce, following him on her knees, proffering consummation. And Amintor, for all his revulsion, is tempted, reaching for his sword in a highly ambiguous gesture.[53] I suspect a freely associative Middletonian way with innuendo in phrases such as 'For God's sake, *stand*' and 'Thou dost awake some*thing* that troubles me/ And says I loved thee once' (161, 164-5).[54] As Amintor breaks away, Evadne, in a sudden access of calm, declares that she will 'die' for him (169), and turns the bloody blade on herself, a virgin-whore martyr for love.[55] In a final spousal gesture, Amintor proves unable to stay her hand:

[50] The reference is, I take it, to Christ's harrowing of hell.
[51] Cf. Isabella's bridal fashion in the execution scene of *The Insatiate Countess*. Knives have associations with brides too, as traditional wedding gifts.
[52] Cf. Seneca's *Medea*, a nuptial tragedy in which the heroine ghoulishly announces herself 'a virgin again, newborn, unsullied' (1005) at the denouement.
[53] Cf. the tragicomic play with phallic blades in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *Philaster*.
[54] My italics. 'Stand' and 'thing' are among the most common sexual puns of the era.
[55] Evadne has little in common with her namesake in Greek myth except that her suicide is figured as a sexual union with her husband (a *coup de théâtre* in Euripides' *The Suppliant Women*).

'Thy hand was welcome, but it came too late' (172). Her end sends another shockwave of displaced eroticism through the playhouse.

During this tragic struggle there is another figure onstage – the prone and wounded Aspatia. She disappears for three Acts after her farewell aria, though there are reminders of her throughout, particularly in Amintor's sense that his punishment stems from his 'faithless sin' to her: 'This 'tis to break a troth!' (3.1.217, 282). Her return is a suicide mission: disguised as her avenging younger brother, she provokes Amintor into a duel in which she fails to defend herself. Her self-sacrifice is depicted on the first Quarto title-page, which probably attests to its original appeal. It is a scene illustrative of the play's title, one which seems to identify Aspatia as the central tragic figure.[56] Not all critics are happy to see her in this light. William Shullenberger, for example, finds her role 'irrelevant to the rest of the story', and suggests that her death has a 'vaudeville' aspect compared to the genuine tragic impact of Evadne's.[57] I agree with Shullenberger that Evadne is the most powerfully realised figure in the play, but I would point to his astute comment on virginity as 'the tragic crux and the driving obsession' for *both* female protagonists.[58] The best readings insist on Aspatia's emblematic centrality within the overarching nuptial structure. She is more of a Dido than a Medea in that her death is a matter of 'masochistic, self-directed' violence,[59] yet she co-opts her faithless trothplight lover as an unwitting accomplice in her suicide. Evadne is the play's main female revenger, but Aspatia's death at the hands of the man who betrayed her is also a form of revenge. That she carries it out in male guise is a brilliant conceit, making of her action something that simultaneously fulfils masculine and feminine heroic codes, both active and passive. It even has an air of plausibility since her brother, who serves with Melantius, might well feel honour-bound to take revenge.[60]

[56] Some critics have pointed to its double aspect, suggestive of both Aspatia, the 'forsaken virgin', and Evadne, the 'lost virgin'.
[57] Shullenberger 1982: 152, 154. Other critics have also found her end lacking in coherence or resolution, eg. Appleton 1956: 38; Leech 1962: 126.
[58] Shullenberger 1982: 154.
[59] Heubert 1977: 610.
[60] Melantius is himself, of course, a brotherly avenger.

Aspatia's 'unpractised way to… die' also serves as a surrogate nuptial union, 'an ironic literalization of the metaphorical battle of bride and groom'.[61] The chaste Aspatia is as sexually driven as the transgressive Evadne. Her artfully worked death employs close choreography and poignant innuendo. Aspatia falls just as Evadne enters – true and false brides on the threshold of death. Aspatia's two sets of 'O, O, O!' cries (5.3.151, 176) frame Evadne's temptation of Amintor; they are, in a far more subdued mode, as sexualised as the similar cries of Beatrice-Joanna and Desdemona. In a transferral of erotic energy, Aspatia revives just as Evadne dies – though Amintor does not realise at first. Over the two prone bodies, he trembles in a way that recalls his surrogate orgasm on the first wedding night; an eroticized suicidal impulse stems from 'some hidden power in these dead things/ That calls my flesh unto 'em' (179-80). Further amatory connotations quiver in phrases such as 'man enough', 'stands up', 'this act unsatisfied' and 'blood climbs up' (181-99). Aspatia, overhearing Amintor's expressions of regret,[62] welcomes his repentance, taking an orgasmic satisfaction in her own death: 'A kind of healthful joy wanders within me' (210). Finally, she reaches for Amintor – 'mine hands grope up and downe' (219) – and dies holding his hand in conjugal affection. Such intimacy is the closest the couple come to being 'one flesh'. Desire dies with Aspatia; 'nothing stirs', however much Amintor tries to 'bow/ The body thus' (230, 233-4). He pleads to heaven that she be restored, but union can only be achieved in a *liebestod*: 'Here's to be with thee, love!' (242). The pair 'die' as virgins, in a parodic consummation. This romantic victory-in-defeat has a skewed transcendence, however, with the trio of corpses forming a bigamous tableau of unresolved desires.

It would be ruinous to draw overt attention to the sexual implications in performance, however hard it might be for the actor playing Melantius to deliver the line 'May I stand/ Stiff here for ever!' (250-1) during the bleak and disillusioned summation.[63] *The Maid's Tragedy* is a sombre play, for all its wittily constructed paradoxes. The emotive appeal of the love-deaths is underwritten with mordant irony – underwritten but not undermined. This not the irony, I think, of postmodern dodges and erasures. The detachment is rather a conduit to emotion. *The Maid's Tragedy* steers perilously

[61] Neill 1970: 126. See also Craik 1988: 24 and Ornstein 1960: 176 on the death-as-consummation theme.
[62] She never learns that Amintor was himself duped.
[63] Bliss 1987: 105-6 argues that no ideals survive in a play that offers no hope.

close at times towards such anti-tragic dead-ends as sentimentalism, didacticism or nihilism, but it still achieves a moving climax. That it does so is thanks in no small part to the meticulous 'tragic wedding' design, with its narrative fulfilment in thwarted eroticism. Amintor's question 'Are these the joys of marriage?' was a resonant one for the Stuart age, particularly for a social milieu in which heightened matrimonial idealism frequently met with compromised realities. The bridal-chamber once more proves a cauldron of desire and ideology. The protagonists do not have the psychological hinterland of the greatest tragic figures – a singing mesh of backstory and memory – but they are not without interiority. The playwrights approach the extreme romantic dilemmas with a patient and perceptive regard, one that belies their reputation for arbitrary sensationalism. The failed matrimonial rites of passage make for a collective tragedy, in which a groom and two brides end as martyrs of love in an interwoven consummation. The King's Men had another hit 'wedding night tragedy'. Its authors went on to explore the theme of bridal martyrdom in a number of other 'tragic wedding' plays, and it is this aspect I foreground in my next section.

'SAINT OF THY SEXE': BRIDAL MARTYROLOGY IN *THE TRAGEDY OF THIERRY AND THEODORET*

The Tragedy of Thierry and Theodoret contains the other major tragic use of a delayed consummation plot in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon. I follow Cyrus Hoy in considering the play a probable three-way collaboration between Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger, perhaps of 1613, the year in which Beaumont withdrew from and Massinger arrived on the theatrical scene.[64] If this date is correct, the play could be seen as an early attempt to rework a hit formula – the subverted wedding night – capitalising on the success of *Othello* and *The Maid's Tragedy*. The erotic displacement in *Thierry and Theodoret*, however, is rooted more in hagiographic traditions and discourses of abstinence. Pearse includes it among a group of 'typical chastity plays', plays in which female continence is tested and glorified.[65] It is clear

[64] Hoy 1958: 97-8, 105.
[65] Pearse 1973: 166-70.

from the first Folio's commendatory verses that Fletcherian heroines were felt by some to serve as near-sacred exemplars, inculcating chastity among female playgoers.[66] *Thierry and Theodoret*'s Ordella is perhaps the purest of them all. Charles Lamb, despite finding Fletcher's emphasis on female virtue overstrained, suggests that Ordella embodies 'the most perfect idea of the female heroic character'.[67] He singles out Act 4.1 which focuses on her self-sacrificing nature as the finest scene in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon. The play as a whole was generally ranked in the nineteenth century as the dramatists' best tragic work after *The Maid's Tragedy*.[68] Twentieth century commentators were rather less complimentary: according to William Appleton, the play typifies the 'straining after effect' and 'essential emptiness' of Fletcherian tragedy; Clifford Leech suggests that 'in its sequence of villainous contrivances, it is too suggestive of a dramatic formula being applied'.[69] There is indeed much that is formulaic or (as in the Theodoret plot) underpowered in the play. Most critics do, however, agree that there are intriguing individual scenes, 'moments of strange quietness', as Leech puts it.[70] Such scenes relate, on the whole, to the 'tragic wedding' design.

The play concerns the troubles inflicted upon Thierry and Theodoret (the kings of France and Austrachia, respectively) by their villainous mother, Brunhalt, who will stop at nothing to preserve her political power and libidinous freedoms – even, ultimately, the assassination of her sons. The story is loosely based on an episode of Merovingian history,[71] one clearly selected for the dramatic potential of its broken nuptials scenario. The malign subversion of the nuptial night is outlined in the source: Brunhalt, afraid of losing out on political influence to Thierry's new wife, uses charms to render the king impotent, thereby destroying the marriage. The playwrights adapt this idea by introducing a physician, Lecure, who concocts a drink to rob Thierry of his manhood for five days in the hope that his bride, Ordella, will reject him:

> If she have any part of women in her,

[66] Pearse 26-28.
[67] Lamb 1844: 62.
[68] See also Gosse 1894: 81 and Swinburne 1910: 613-14.
[69] Appleton 1956: 87; Leech 1962: 136.
[70] Leech 1962: 134.
[71] Brunhalt is the grandmother in the source (de Serres' history of France).

She'le or fly out, or at least give occasion
Of such a breach which nere can be made up,
Since he that to all else did never faile
Of as much as could be performde by man,
Proves only ice to her. 2.1.309-14

Thierry is a lustful king in the historical source,[72] and 'performde by man' here seems to imply sexual prowess. His erotic experience in the play is less certain, however.[73] He seems to refer at times to his virility with women (4.2.54-5), but when Thierry expresses pride over his Herculean potency, it is to boast more of continence, of how he restrains himself from tyrannical sexual abuses – whilst threatening that he could well indulge in such actions if ever crossed in his absolutist will (2.1.36ff.). Overall the playwrights present Thierry as a more virtuous figure than in the source, though not one without significant moral ambiguity. A restrained note is sounded on receiving news of Ordella's arrival: 'heaven be pleasde/ That I may use these blessings powrde on me/ With moderation' (241-3). He looks for divine aid in meeting the ideal of temperance within his marriage to a beautiful fifteen-year-old who 'dotes on him' (302).

Making of prospective erotic joy a nullity is the essential principle of evil in the 'tragic wedding' theatregram. Brunhalt's response to Thierry's invocation of heaven is to call on 'Hell and furies' for aid (243). Once again, there are echoes of the Common Prayer Book in the suggestion that the ruination of marriage is the devil's particular mission. The dramatists make use of a standard ploy in having the drug administered at the wedding banquet, where the wicked machinations of Brunhalt are contrasted with the goodness of Ordella. The latter acts as a peacemaker when factional dissent breaks out: 'do not suffer/ Our bridall night to be the Centaures feast' (2.4.104-5).[74] Ordella also tries to give up her place at the table to Brunhalt, but Thierry insists on his bride's pre-eminence, unwittingly stirring his mother's malice. The bridegroom's expression of nuptial desire is relatively restrained as he departs for the bridal-chamber: 'I too long/ Deferre my choicest delicates' (2.4.113-14). The villains take an erotic delight in their 'stealing joy' plot: Brunhalt conjures her lover

[72] He even remains potent with women other than his wife, the malign spell only pertaining to the bridal chamber.
[73] Clark 1994: 93 notes this ambiguity too.
[74] A reference to the archetypal wedding battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths.

Protaldye to 'glut me with/ Those best delights of man, that are denide/ To her that does expect them, being a bride' (2.4.171-3). As in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, the sexual energy of the wedding night is siphoned off into illicit pleasures.

The action cuts straight to the bridal-suite; the direction '*Enter* Thierry, *and* Ordella, *as from bed*' introduces another scene of domestic intimacy. The audience, unlike that for *The Maid's Tragedy*, is primed. Again, we see a kind of naturalism within the rare situation as the ramifications of the plot unfold. A distraught Thierry correctly surmises that the drink has 'quencht [his] natural heate' (3.1.3), but he retreats into bitter self-recrimination in the face of Ordella's tender concern:

> ORDELLA Speake nearer to my understanding, like a husband.
> THIERRY How should he speake the language of a husband,
> Who wants the tongue and organs of his voyce? 3.1.19-21

Corporeal humiliation engulfs the king. At this point, however, the playwrights depart from their source with a characteristic reversal – far from breaking the marriage, Brunhalt's plot backfires, creating not dissent but concord. The bride pledges to make up for any failings on her part, selflessly dismissing her own needs: 'My farthest hope of good reacht at your pleasure' (31). Her lack of erotic heat prompts Thierry to wonder whether they have returned to the prelapsarian innocence of

> the first chast couple,
> Before the want of joy taught guilty sight
> A way through shame and sorrow to delight?
> Say, may we mixe as in their innocence
> When turtles kist, to confirme happinesse,
> Not to beget it? 3.1.38-43.

This notion of an asexual Adam and Eve goes back to patristic exegesis,[75] but also reflects Renaissance debates about sin and sexuality. The matter of Edenic sex – if, when, how – was a particular concern for Protestant divines looking to counter what they felt was an unhealthy and hypocritical Catholic privileging of virginity and celibacy. Thierry, in his impotent shame, is drawn towards an ascetic ideal, the notion of marriage based solely on blissful fellowship, without the need to procreate. Yet the passage also holds a competing sense that sex offers a route back to Edenic bliss.

[75] See Brown 1988.

Reformists insisted on the procreative naturalness of sex within marriage; for some, its pleasure assuaged the 'shame and sorrow' of fallen sexuality.[76] Neoplatonic discourse justified arousal in response to beauty, challenging the sense of 'guilty sight' betokened by the modest fig-leaf. Even as the emasculated Thierry embraces celibacy, then, we sense how torn he is: however desirable a state of innocent fellowship might be, it leaves something to be desired, a 'want of joy', an untasted paradisal delight.

The dramatic verse here is knotty and intense, pulling back from anguished rhetoric to a more contemplative mode. The tragic wedding convention is not just about sensation, it also allows for the airing of multiple discourses. Here the wider debates about sex and marriage are internalised, channelled through a dichotomous voice. In the play as a whole the febrile plot elaborations give little breathing-space for tragic development, but this scene (probably written by Beaumont) has an affective intensity. Thierry is dumbfounded at first by his bride's accommodating placidity; pressing Ordella over her apparent lack of erotic curiosity or concern, he finds no chink in her chaste catechism. Is she prepared to bind herself to him even if she knows he is impotent? Is she prepared to forgo the chance of children? Ordella states that being a mother to his children was 'only worthy of my Virgin loss' (3.1.51), but she is perfectly content to live in a marriage of strict continence if that is what her husband desires. Lust is nothing to her; she only wishes a chaste, companionate marriage with a virtuous ruler. Faced with her platitudinous Griselda-like patience, Thierry reaffirms his sexual renunciation:

> Oh who would know a wife,
> That might have such a friend? Posterity
> Henceforth lose the name of blessing, an leave
> The earth inhabited to people heaven. 3.1.96-9.

Playing on the biblical notion of 'know', Thierry employs old scholastic arguments in order to reject procreative marriage. These are appropriate to the sixth century setting (though the play is notorious for various anachronisms). Robert Ornstein reads the wedding night scene in *The Maid's Tragedy* as a witty inversion of the St. Cecilia story, with a whore instead of a saintly virgin converting her husband to abstinence in

[76] See Turner 1993.

the bridal-chamber.[77] At first glance Ordella seems much more in the pious Cecilia mould, but there is a crucial difference. The playwrights repackage the legends for Renaissance times, with the emphasis not on a bride of Christ but on an obliging earthly companion. The husband and wife's holy ardour for one another is what will prepare them for heaven.

As in *The Maid's Tragedy*, the delayed consummation offers a challenge to the prevailing high erotic expectations of marriage. But in tonal terms the wedding night scenes are polar opposites. The transgressive challenge voiced by Evadne is rooted in a cynical and materialistic equation of sex with earthly power; in *Thierry and Theodoret* the challenge refashions an older discourse, an ascetic or gnostic rejection of the body in favour of spiritual aspiration. Where Amintor is stripped of naïve Petrarchan and Neoplatonic assumptions about women and beauty,[78] Thierry finds a new faith in austere female purity. But we are immediately invited to cast a sceptical eye over his idolatry. It is with the zeal of the convert that Thierry greets the court in the post-nuptial exchange. He cuts a comically histrionic figure, showering praise on the silent, abashed Ordella, proclaiming her sovereign in her power over him (the opposite to what Brunhalt intended). Without explaining what has occurred, Thierry insists on continued nuptial celebrations, and wonders why no *reveille* has been played: 'Musique, why art thou so/ Slow voyct?' (125-6). As in *Othello*, no consummation has occurred to justify the ritual, but the ironic twist here is that the groom finds the sexual failure a cause of joy. The farcical nature of his behaviour is underlined by the dry comments of Theodoret and Martell who assume that comments such as 'My joyes are unbounded' (115) celebrate the bride's erotic power. As rational, sceptical figures, they find the king's feverish behaviour incredulous. The comedy extends into the following scene where Protaldye discusses the newlyweds' apparent erotic bliss with a court lady: 'These are the joyes of marriage Lady' (3.2.49). The conscious echo of Amintor's 'Are these the joys of marriage?' conveys once more that such delights are not a given.

[77] Ornstein 1960: 175.
[78] See Danby 1952 on this discourse in Beaumont and Fletcher.

Thierry's quixotic post-nuptial performance continues in private conversation with his mother. His hagiographic praise of Ordella intensifies, making of her an icon of purity for young girls to emulate:

> Beyond your sexes faith,
> The unripe virgins of our age to hear't
> Will dreame themselves to women, and convert
> The example to a miracle. 3.1.147-50

Thierry admits that he is 'no man', but then his asexual rarefied bride is 'no woman' (136). He critiques the 'hope to satisifie a wife' as 'ridiculous' (138-9), in a further challenge to the dominant matrimonial discourse. The joy of the wedding night has been stolen, but Thierry revels in his unmanned state, proclaiming indifference to fatherhood and posterity. Such glassy-eyed delirium is a Beaumont and Fletcher speciality. Thierry's self-delusion is soon exposed when Brunhalt, feigning motherly concern, implicates Theodoret in a plot against Thierry, being the chief beneficiary of a childless match. Adopting a new Machiavellian strategy, she entices her son with the prospect of fruitful sex with Ordella:

> but from such a wife, such virtue,
> To get an heire, what Hermit would not find
> Deserving argument to breake his vow,
> Even in his age, of chastity? 3.1.161-4

The easily swayed Thierry is immediately converted back: 'You have timely wakende me' (173). Within one scene he both embraces and rejects a strict marital continence, swiftly traversing centuries of scholastic debate.

The final movement of the play sees the authors adopt the by-now established formula of working towards a displaced nuptial consummation in death. Brunhalt persuades Thierry to learn his fate from a magus – the disguised Lecure – who prophesies that the king will have children, but only if he sacrifices the first woman who emerges from the temple of Diana the next morning.[79] Thierry has no apparent moral qualms over this. He jumps at the chance, suggesting that the woman who serves as a human sacrifice will be blessed as a 'Mother of Princes, whose grave shall be more fruitefull/ Then other marriage beds' (3.3.63-4) – a comparison which draws on the familiar

[79] The pagan setting and proposal is wilfully anachronistic.

conjunctions of bed and bier, womb and tomb. The king's ready acceptance of this proposal for personal and dynastic ends smacks of the tyranny he earlier held in abeyance. He is an unstable dupe – one of the most ludicrously gullible figures in early modern drama.[80] Inherently volatile, he goes haywire when his conjugal rites of passage are disturbed. The scene ends with his determination to slay any woman, including his mother or niece, in order to become 'one flesh' with his wife: ''twere a gainefull death/ Could give *Ordellas* virtue living breath' (3.3.68-9).

Behind this statement lies not only desire for such a union, but also an implicit sense of Ordella's perfection as something of a lifeless monument. Unused sexual vitality comes to the fore in the sacrifice scene, so highly rated in the nineteenth century. Beaumont and Fletcher display the early modern delight in paradox to a high degree: Ordella will, of course, be the first woman to emerge from the temple, meaning that she must die to live. The scene opens with Thierry and Martell waiting outside Diana's temple. Martell's unintended innuendo hints that the effects of the impotence drug are wearing off: 'Your grace is early stirring' (4.1.1).[81] The restoration of unfettered 'manly powers' (14) is a crucial aspect here.[82] The excitable king compares himself to a longing bride and to a soldier going into battle; he is one whose 'happinesse is lay'd up in an houre/ Hee knowes comes stealing toward him' (2-3) – this being the hour of nuptial delight that, according to the emergent convention, must be stolen.[83] Thierry's fervent declamatory speeches build suspense, suggesting an erotic anticipation heightened by delay. The rhetoric of humanist nuptial idealism is as extreme as that of his earlier asceticism:

> this day beauty
> The envy of the world, pleasure the glory,
> Content above the world, desire beyond it
> Are made my owne and usefull. 4.1.16-19

[80] His response to Brunhalt's justification of the murder of Theodoret is asinine. Othello and Massinissa are gullible too, but they are ensnared by rather more insidious or colossal forces.
[81] See the entry on 'stir' in Partridge 2001.
[82] This is confirmed at 4.2.234 when Thierry, later in the day, proclaims his 'weaknesse' gone.
[83] See Chapter 3.

The usefulness referred to relates to his public duty. France, he suggests, is crying out for an heir.[84] That the sacrifice is for the benefit of the nation seems to allow Martell – elsewhere a moral touchstone – to go along with the macabre plan, professedly envying the sacrificial victim, though contributions such as 'Happy woman/ That dies to do these things' (19-20) have a droll agnostic ring, serving to deflate the king's grandiloquence. The scene takes a blackly comic turn as, much to Thierry's frustration, various *men* emerge from the temple. Genuine suspense is created as we await the arrival of the sacrificial victim. She appears wearing a veil, very much the bride (of death).

The artificial situation has, like the death-rebirth scene in *Cymbeline*, the feel of a fable. The veil keeps the men from recognising Ordella,[85] whilst she conceals her identity, addressing her husband throughout with a subservient 'Sir'. Thierry descants on the supernatural or masculine spirit required by the woman who must meet death (in the form of Thierry) as a passionate lover, thus restoring her king's potency:

> O let her meete my blow, doate on her deathe;
> And as a wanton vine bowes to the pruner,
> That by his cutting off more may encrease,
> So let her fall to raise me fruite 4.1.58-61.

Thierry explains that the sacrifice is for a 'generall blessing' rather than a merely private satisfaction, though for him the political is clearly personal: 'make *France* young agen, and me a man' (75, 128). The more he emphasises the dread of the undertaking, the more Ordella's anticipation rises. She sheds the temperance of the wedding night as repressed desire starts to pulse: 'you strangely stir me Sir'; 'I joy in't/ Above a moderate gladnesse' (79, 82-3). Her amorous nature responds at the point of ultimate renunciation; she never seems more alive than on the threshold of this marriage-to-death.

The eroticized nature of the sacrifice is boldly delineated in action as well as words. Ordella stands bravely to receive the blow; Thierry raises his sword, signifying the

[84] There is a sense of 'double-time' here, perhaps an error of collaboration – the royal couple's barrenness seems public knowledge (4.1.22; 4.1.162) but in the previous scene, set on the day before, Thierry demands 'the concealing of my barren shame' (3.3.39).
[85] It is hard to imagine an audience being quite so blind, despite being kept in the dark over the details of the plot.

restoration of phallic potency. At the last moment he dares her to remove the veil to 'behold thy happiness' (136), a rite associated, of course, with marriage. On recognising his wife, Thierry, as the stage direction has it, '*lets fall his sword*', his weapon shrinking from penetration. A biblical image springs immediately to his mind 'No, I dare not,/ There is an Angell keepes that paradice,/ A fiery angell' (139-40). There is no way back to Eden, Ordella being, he believes, of a different, unfallen nature. His wife, kneeling, pleads with masochistic passion to die by 'a thousand blows', but Thierry would, like some desert ascetic, rather 'let the earth be barren' (143-44). This is a far cry from the renunciatory rapture of the nuptial night, however. Now he feels separated from his celestial bride, who he perceives as a Marian figure, a perpetual virgin 'nearest to thy maker' (146). He flees from the scene to 'the funerall of all my hopes,/ … the marriage of my sorrowes (4.2.75-6). Ironically, in his tragic blindness, ruled by the prophecy, he fails to see the obvious remedy at hand – that, with the raising of the sword, the physical impediment to consummation has already been lifted.

Ordella's inherent virtue has once more unwittingly thwarted an evil scheme – Brunhalt's Iago-esque desire for Thierry to kill own wife. The young bride feels cheated, however, robbed of martyrological glory. Her husband, she complains, 'leaves me in my best use' (197) – that is, refuses to kill her to fulfil the prophecy (though the sexual aspect of 'use' is also in play). In the exchange that follows, she threatens suicide, but is dissuaded by Martell for whom she is an angelic paragon. Wondering belatedly if the prophesy was a malign plot, he suggests that Ordella goes into hiding, whilst he gives out news that she has indeed sacrificed herself for Thierry's benefit. Their exchange is melodramatic fare, but there is a quiet power to Ordella's self-sacrificing willingness to make way for other women, enabling Thierry to have children

> In wombes ordainde for issues, in those beauties
> That blesse a marriage bed, and makes it proceede
> With kisses that conceive, and fruitefull pleasures;
> Mine like a grave, buries those loyall hopes,
> And to a grave it covets. 4.1.178-182

Ordella is haunted by the wedding night failure. Despite having reassured Thierry over the prospect of a celibate marriage, she is pained by her status as a virginal and hence barren wife. She wept when asked about children earlier in the scene – an unabashedly sentimental moment – but there is nothing lachrymose about her corporeal self-loathing here, conceiving of her unconsecrated womb as a grave. Familiar tropes are put to potent use as the blameless bride blames herself for failing to excite her husband, failing to make the transition to fertile womanhood. For all the outré nature of the situation, the adolescent deathwish is distressingly credible.

The notion of the marriage bed as a tomb is once more literalised in the final scene, though the mood is very different to previous scenes of 'tragic consummation'. Thierry has been poisoned by his mother to prevent him taking a new wife – Ordella's supposed dying wish – and the death-bed scene opens with a satire on the hapless doctors who try to cure him. Brunhalt's machinations as the 'Hope of hell' (5.2.74) are discovered; when called upon to repent by her son, she calls him 'Holy foole', one of several phrases that turn Thierry into a rather unlikely religious, even Christ-like, figure ('Why do you crucifie me'; 'By this faire holy light') (42, 76, 112). Ordella is brought to the bedside, once again veiled as if a bride.[86] When her face is revealed, Thierry considers her an apparition, perhaps an avenging angel, but her smiles, tears and kisses convince him that she is still lovingly alive. Her virginal intercession eases his pain. Their displaced nuptial union is achieved in death, the pair fainting together on 'One dying kisse' (181). It is the quietest of consummations, without the perverse erotic charge of many other tragic wedding deaths. The ameliorative quietude is emphasised when news is received of a hellish offstage analogue: Brunhalt has 'chokt herself' on seeing Protaldye tortured, hearing his 'cries and rores' (144, 178).[87] The bride and groom's end fulfils the abstemious vows of their wedding night, but alongside the spirituality is a tender physicality as Thierry finds 'heaven in [Ordella's] embraces' and declares 'My joyes are too much for me' (138, 176). His earlier renunciation, 'Oh who would know a wife…?', is countered here with the assurance 'and you shall know her' (157). The ascetic union is physically embodied; their conjugal love is at once sexual and asexual. The phrase that begins Thierry's last

[86] Cf. Euripides' Alcestis, restored to life after voluntary sacrifice for her husband's benefit.
[87] Pearse 1973: 167 and Clark 1994: 95 rightly highlight the psychological thinness of Brunhalt, but there is something powerful in her lack of repentance and her unbroken bond with her lover.

speech, ‘Thou perfect woman’ (182), implies that Ordella is the unfallen Eve, Diana’s devotee, a spotless Mary, but it also draws on epithalamic convention to suggest that she has ‘put perfection on’ as a bride at the moment of erotic death.

The delayed consummation structure once again leads to a moment of spousal intimacy, albeit one surrounded by an onstage audience. Thierry asks the onlookers to kneel to Ordella, holding her up as a female wonder, the ‘Saint of thy sexe’ (155). The playwrights draw overtly on hagiographic traditions. The sexual abnegation of medieval brides of Christ, however, was motivated by the prospect of spiritual union in heaven. They rejected marriage, the institution at the heart of worldly power. In *Thierry and Theodoret*, however, Ordella’s main desire is to please her husband in whatever way she can, be it strict continence, virginal martyrdom or palliative erotic embrace. She is prepared to die for him as his ‘servant’ (172), whether literally or (through sex) figuratively. In the end, she cannot live without him. Ordella is presented, then, as a saint of matrimony. Catholic hagiography is adapted to Protestant-humanist ends. As a pure maiden-wife, Ordella embodies the matrimonial ‘sacrament it selfe’; she is placed above all previous saints, embodying an honour that they were ‘but dim shadowes of’ (4.1.31, 78). The hyperbole is Thierry’s, who is presented with scepticism throughout, but Ordella’s virtue is treated without irony, I believe – however tempting it is to see her as a spoof, a kind of early modern Stepford wife. A parallel might be drawn with the sympathetic admiration directed towards the Countess of Rutland, Elizabeth (Sidney) Manners, the daughter of Sir Philip Sidney, who seems to have shown patient fortitude in an apparently unconsummated marriage. The situation is alluded to in Beaumont’s elegy for her, quoted in my introduction, which expresses genuine empathy, alongside a powerful sense of dismay at the unlived sexual life.[88] The dramatization of ascetic and amorous polarities within marriage was not merely theoretical.

With its submissive heroine, obtuse hero and thinly-motivated villain it is hard to see *Thierry and Theodoret* finding much favour again. In his classic taxonomy of revenge tragedy, Fredson Bowers reckons the play unintegrated and unfulfilling: ‘With all the

[88] Might her death in 1612 have a bearing on *Thierry*’s date? Consider the satirical attack on doctors in 5.2; such satire was common but its strength echoes the similar attack in Beaumont’s elegy.

smoke in their plot, there has been no fire'.[89] Measuring the play against conventional revenge structures, Bowers finds a lack of cause and effect, a stew of disconnected dramatic conventions, and no discernible tragic pay-off. Yet *Thierry and Theodoret* appears to have been a significant hit. Bowers himself discusses its influence on William Heminge's sensational revenge (and nuptial) tragedy, *The Fatal Contract*.[90] What Bowers misses, I suggest, is the delayed consummation structure which underpins the play's main movement and provides an affective closure of a different order. The playwrights put the relatively new tragic wedding formula to memorable use. In the audacious scenes I have concentrated on, they create ironic inversions, sites of cultural debate and channels for sublimated feeling. The story of wedding night impotence creates erotic suspense, an underlying current that pushes toward the love-death union even at moments of renunciation. The pulse of thwarted love would, I believe, have had an emotive impact in the playhouse, particularly in the sacrifice scene.

Thierry and Theodoret was not, perhaps, the first play in which an unconsummated marriage is used to explore themes of sexual abstinence and virgin martyrdom – we saw something similar in *The Atheist's Tragedy*. The exploration is taken much further, however, and may well have influenced a spate of plays in the decade or so that followed which address such issues.[91] The popularity of the subverted wedding night itself is further exemplified in tragicomic variations within the Beaumont and Fletcher canon. *The Custom of the Country* (c.1619-20), a hit play by Fletcher and Massinger, utilises a delayed consummation structure, with the parted lovers put through a series of chastity tests, very much in the mode of Greek romance.[92] The 'Saint-like modesty' (1.1.73) of the heroine, Zenocia, is emphasised throughout. The initial broken nuptial stems from a tyrant's attempt to claim *droit du seigneur*. Zenocia's regretful father lines the bedchamber with funereal drapes, strews the bed with 'withered flowers' and requests a 'sad Epithalamion', stating 'This is no masque of mirth, but murdered honour' (1.2.1, 10-11). As it is, the wedding night rape is itself

[89] Bowers 1940: 169.
[90] Bowers 1940: 239.
[91] Eg. Fletcher/ Massinger, *The Knight of Malta*; Massinger, *The Maid of Honour*, Massinger/ Dekker *The Virgin Martyr*.
[92] The source is Cervantes' *Persiles and Sigismunda*; Cervantes promoted it as 'a book which dares to compete with Heliodorus' (quoted in González Echevarría 2005: 213).

subverted in a masque of Diana led by Zenocia in a spirit of 'militant chastity'.[93] She later embraces the chance to die for her trothplight husband, Arnoldo, 'to be his Martyr' (4.3.156); and when it appears that, put under a malign spell, she is indeed dying, she is hailed as 'This virgin wife, the Master peice' (5.4.3). In the penultimate scene the lovers appear to succumb to death in sorrowful sympathy, not in a bed this time, but in two chairs placed side by side (possibly forming a bed-like structure). It is a clear refashioning of the *Thierry and Theodoret* death scene; here, though, the villains repent and the couple are restored to health at the close. The providential 'hand of Heaven' rewards the 'unspotted progresse' of their love (5.5.232, 236).

The wittiest take on the theme of bridal martyrology comes in *A Wife for a Month* (1624), a late sole-authored tragicomedy by Fletcher which has, as Philip Finkelpearl observes, 'a curiously retrospective quality, as though Fletcher were recapitulating much of his life's work'.[94] Its 'delayed consummation' plot suggests both the popularity of the tragic wedding formula and the playwright's sense of it as open to continual reinvention. The heroine, Evanthe, rejects her king's sexual propositions, remaining true to her admirer, Valerio. The king obtains one of the latter's Petrarchan poems which concludes: '*To be your owne but one poore Moneth. I'd give/ My youth, my fortune, and then leave to live*' (1.2.91-2). The affectation is taken wickedly at face value by the king who commands the lovers to marry, but only for a month, after which they face execution. They accept their fate – a kind of solemnized *carpe diem* – with Valerio keen to enter a marital paradise where 'fruit was ne're forbidden' (180). The king twists the knife, however, with a condition to make Valerio 'wish he were dead on's marriage day' (2.3.38): should the couple (who will be spied on) have sex, Evanthe will be put to death immediately. Informing her of the condition will also mean her death. Older critics tended to find in this scenario evidence of Fletcher's 'beastly perverseness of fancy, his prostitution of art to sordid sensationalism',[95] but more recent analysis finds it sensitively handled despite its prurience. A desperate Valerio claims impotence to keep from the bridal-bed; like Ordella, Evanthe responds with a vow of abstinence, albeit far more reluctantly: 'I am compell'd to love you spiritually' (3.3.240). The vibrant Evanthe embodies the concept of 'modest

[93] Pearson 1980: 27.
[94] Finkelpearl 1990: 231. Finkelpearl gives an excellent extended discussion of the play. See also Foster 2004: 84-88 and Clark 1994: 39-42.
[95] Gayley 1914: 404.

amorousness', being chaste but scarcely restrained in her desires. Later, having learned of the plot, she upbraids Valerio for not allowing her 'to dye nobly' as a bridal martyr: 'I would have lyen with thee under a Gallowes,/ Though the Hangman had been my *Hymen*' (4.5.34, 50-51). This sort of outburst is what Coleridge had in mind when he suggested that some of Beaumont and Fletcher's 'virtuous women' are 'Strumpets in their imaginations and wishes'.[96] Valerio, however, praises his wife's 'minde celestiall' (70). Fletcher's final wedding night drama offers a complete hagiographic reversal, making the true test of female sanctity not virginity but defloration, not renunciation but consummation.

[96] Quoted in Pearse 1973: 18.

A Caroline Coda

A recent production of John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (c.1630) at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse came with the promotional warning (or enticement) 'Contains nudity and scenes of a sexual nature'.[1] In one interpolated scene, instead of emerging '*as from their chamber*', the incestuous lovers, Annabella and Giovanni, were shown naked in bed together. What can be witnessed onstage since playwrights such as Shakespeare, Marston and Ford first took drama into the bedchamber has changed, but on the evening when I saw the show, it was the staging of an original 'scene of a sexual nature' that drew a gasp from members of the audience. This presented Giovanni's eroticized killing of a (fully-clothed) Annabella on the bed, an act in which he determines, Othello-like, 'To save thy fame, and kill thee in a kiss' (5.5.84). It was not the phallic thrusting of a knife that prompted the audience response, but the revelation, as Annabella was released from Giovanni's clasp, of a large spill of blood across white sheets.

Annabella is dressed at this point 'in her bridal robes' (5.2.10), as part of a vengeful mock-wedding ploy designed by her husband, Soranzo, and his servant, Vasques. The latter sets up the bedchamber rendezvous with a vicarious pleasure that recalls Iago, hoping that Giovanni 'may post to Hell in the very act of his damnation' (5.4.32-3). Vasques echoes Iago too in urging his master to take revenge on one who would 'cuckold you in your bride-bed' (5.2.3-4) – Soranzo having been robbed of his wedding night joy when he discovered that Annabella was pregnant. The demand for Annabella to don her bride-dress, justified ostensibly as a matter of reconciliation on Soranzo's part, is meant to drive home the nuptial negation when Giovanni is killed. As it is, the dress might be felt to legitimise the incestuous union symbolically, in that Giovanni's murder of his sister fulfils their first clandestine vows – 'Love me, or kill me' (1.2.243-8) – made nine months earlier. The timing here is carefully chosen, an instance of tragic reverse engineering: the child carried by Annabella was, it seems, conceived on the first night of transgressive passion. In an inversion of standard epithalamic blessings, the 'hapless fruit' (5.5.94) proves a curse. Giovanni's murder

[1] 2014, directed by Michael Longhurst.

of Annabella makes of 'this sad marriage-bed' both 'a cradle and a grave' (96-7), a multivalent synthesis of life's major transition rites. *Othello* is not the only play echoed in all this. Links to *Romeo and Juliet* have often been noted, with both sets of lovers aided or advised (for better or worse) by a nurse and a friar. And various 'tragic wedding' plays are perhaps recalled in other elements: *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* in the nine-month tragic fruition;[2] *The Duchess of Malfi* in the tell-tale pregnancy and the unmarrying rites; and *The Changeling* in the placing of the illicit lovers together for a last deadly act of passion.

Ford concentrates on public as well as private 'maimed rites' in *'Tis Pity*, most famously in the heart-on-a-dagger denouement at the mock-wedding feast. The actual 'bride-banquet' of Annabella and Soranzo 'begins in blood' (4.1.109), being interrupted and cursed by the latter's vengeful lover, Hippolita, to whom he had promised marriage. The classical basis of the theatregram is felt here; Hippolita is named after the mythical abandoned wife who cursed the marriage of Theseus to Phaedra. But English romantic tragedy had gone beyond the need for classical or continental models, having accumulated a store of homegrown conventions – few of them as widely used, as I have argued, than the delayed and displaced consummations of nuptial tragedy. To point out the possible influences on Ford is not to suggest that his employment of the 'tragic wedding' theatregram is overly derivative; on the contrary, he blends the ingredients in remarkable and original fashion. What is unusual in the Caroline period is the cognitive power with which he brings competing discourses into play, most clearly in setting the Epicureanism of Giovanni against the Christian orthodoxy of, first, the friar, and, second, Annabella, newly inculcated in paradigms of redemption and damnation. The debate comes to a head in the bedchamber scene, which offers various paradoxes, such as the atheistic Giovanni blessing his sister as 'white in thy soul' (5.5.64) and heaven-bound even as he works round to slaughter and butchery. Perhaps the play should come with a warning: 'contains scenes of a religious and philosophical nature'. For all the horror of Giovanni's acts, his assessment of his sister makes the corrupt Cardinal's final assessment '*'Tis pity she's a whore*' sound harsh and ungodly, devoid of pity.[3]

[2] It was revived in 1630 – perhaps just before Ford wrote *'Tis Pity*.
[3] Cf. the Duke's judgement of Isabella in *The Insatiate Countess*. See also Thomas Ellice's commendatory poem for *'Tis Pity*, which calls Annabella 'Gloriously fair, even in her infamy'.

Ford's play exemplifies the intimate and conflicted 'tragic wedding' drama I have drawn attention to throughout my study. A similar eclecticism is seen in many other playwrights of the Caroline era, though their recycling of plots and motifs has often been condemned. In Chapter 6, I mentioned that *Thierry and Theodoret* was an influence on William Heminge's *The Fatal Contract, A French Tragedy* (c.1633-4).[4] Fredson Bowers singles out Heminge's play for stinging criticism in a general attack on 'the decadence of revenge tragedy'.[5] Blood-revenge, he argues, remains a driving factor but is subordinated 'to the interest in a love story and in a villainous intrigue' in plots that are 'excessively complicated and artificial'. Bowers groups Heminge's play with Suckling's *Aglaura*, Harding's *Sicily and Naples*, and Falkland's *The Wedding Night* as works that betray an artistic dilettantism and a loss of moral compass. One thing that Bowers does not comment on is that in each of these plays the action revolves around or build towards the wedding night. Tragedy falls, more often than not, in the bridal chamber; 'delayed consummation' structures provide alternative narratological drives, alongside revenge strategies. If we add plays such as William Davenant's *Albovine*, or Francis Jaques' *The Queen of Corsica*, we can see the emergence of an identifiable *sub-genre* – that of 'wedding night tragedy' – as a group of young playwrights responds to and tries to emulate the previous generation.

The fact that they did so speaks volumes for the impact of the Elizabethan and Jacobean 'fatal marriage' plays. Over and again, we see the recycling of *Othello* and *The Maid's Tragedy*, in particular, in scenes of off-the-peg jealousy, say, or when tokenistic political upheaval provides background noise to the bridal chamber events. Bowers is right to suggest that less would usually be more when it comes to the elaborate plotting, but he misses the artfulness with which some of the designs are handled, and the striking individual scenes to be found in most of the plays. Some modern commentators suggest that the young playwrights pay tribute to their forebears rather than merely plagiarising their effects. The Caroline dramatists make knowing nods to audiences fluent in genre-based iconography, creating shocks and provocations, and rapid shifts between sincerity and parody. I had hoped to address

[4] See Morley 2006 on the possible date of Heminge's play. It could be that a revival of *Thierry* c.1633 spurred Heminge to go to similar historical sources.
[5] Bowers 1940: 236ff.

these features in a chapter on ‘wedding night sensationalism’ in the Caroline era, but neither time nor space allows. I will close simply with a question voiced in a soliloquy from James Shirley’s *The Cardinal* (1641), one of the finest of Caroline tragedies. The playwright employs twin ‘delayed consummation’ structures of revenge and romance, creating desire for narrative fulfilment on the part of the audience even as a story of thwarted desire is once again played out. Here, as in many of the plays I have considered, a complex mesh of violent and erotic possibility surrounds the matrimonial transition rites; the concerns of newlywed lovers (and their enemies) acquire an affective force that has rarely been matched in succeeding drama. Their private concerns become, I suggest, our shared concerns, placed in a position of ‘privileged witness’ as the bedchamber denouement approaches: ‘What will become of her, and me, and all/ The world in one small hour?’ (5.3.71-2).

Appendix I

Dating and Attribution of *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*

Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany was first published in 1654 under George Chapman's name, but this has long been considered a misattribution. Whilst T. M. Parrott includes the play in his 1910 edition of Chapman's tragedies, he dismisses the idea that Chapman could be responsible for the play. The 1653 Stationers' Register gives *John* Peele as the author, which some have taken as evidence for a *George* Peele attribution. Later seventeenth-century cataloguers ascribed the play to both Peele and Chapman, with varying degrees of reliability. Twentieth-century discussion of authorship focused on Peele, but no consensus has been reached. Dubious claims have been made on both sides of a sometimes heated debate. *Alphonsus* has been over-confidently assigned to Peele on the basis of diction and parallel passages alone (the evidence, while suggestive, is not conclusive).[1] Others have doubted or rejected Peele as an authorial candidate on the questionable grounds that the plot is too well handled.[2] There has not, of course, been anything equivalent to the critical firepower aimed at establishing Peele as a co-author of *Titus Andronicus*. The result is that, whilst some modern critics treat *Alphonsus* as Peele's, the play usually goes unattributed.

One thing that most critics are agreed upon is that *Alphonsus* belongs to the Elizabethan era, with 1594 the most commonly proposed date. This notion has, however, been challenged recently by Martin Wiggins in the introduction to his catalogue of early modern British drama:[3]

> Some inaccurate traditional datings… arise from a conservative reluctance to dispose of older scholarly hypotheses, no matter how dubious: *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* is traditionally dated 1594 only because somebody once thought it might have been written by George Peele, even though all the external evidence points unerringly to

[1] See Robertson 1905: 126-30 and Sykes 1966: 79-98; Sampley 1933 and Ashley 1968: 30-37 offer rebuttals. Parrott 1910: 688-90 finds both Peelean and non-Peelean features, perhaps as a result of collaboration or revision.
[2] Parrott 1910; 690 and Sampley 1936; Peele's structural capabilities have, however, been assessed more generously by other critics eg. Senn 1973, Ewbank 2011, and Forker 2011: 8-9.
[3] Wiggins 2012: Vol.I xl.

around 1630.

It remains to be seen what external evidence will be provided to support this claim (Wiggins's remarkable catalogue currently covers the years up to 1623). *Alphonsus* was certainly popular in the 1630s,[4] but most commentators believe that a play of the 1590s was revived (and probably revised) in the Caroline era. Seventeenth-century attributions all seem to assume an earlier (ie. pre-Caroline) date of composition too, given that Peele died in 1596 and Chapman stopped writing for the stage around 1612.[5] It is not my intention to mount a full case with regard to either date or authorship, but I make the following observations in support of my claim that *Alphonsus* can be considered the first 'wedding night tragedy'.[6]

Much internal evidence supports the view of *Alphonsus* as an Elizabethan work: Parrott's editorial comments highlight various stylistic features that would be distinctly archaic in a Caroline play.[7] I would add that the opening scene, a lengthy machiavellian primer, is far less likely in a play of the 1630s than in one of the 1590s (Wiggins himself suggests that *Edmund Ironside* is a play of the 1590s on similar grounds).[8] Extant Caroline drama displays no significant interest in Machiavelli.[9] Parrott retains an open mind over authorship, but he notes that the play's fierce prejudices correspond 'more closely to Peele's own anti-Spanish animus than to that of any other possible author'.[10] The liberties taken with historical sources in order to juxtapose English honesty and Spanish perfidy are similar to those taken in Peele's *Edward I*. That *Alphonsus* depicts Edward Longshanks in his youth might also suggest a link to Peele – it is tempting to see the playwright capitalising on his popular hero by offering a prequel of sorts.[11] An irony might have struck the original audience when Alphonsus teases Edward about being 'cumber'd with a wife'

[4] Bentley 1949: 1285-88 records the Caroline stage history.
[5] See Parrott 1910: 683-4 and Sykes 1966: 80-83.
[6] In the following I assume that Peele is the author of both *Titus Andronicus* and *The Troublesome Reign of King John* – see Vickers 2002 and Forker 2011 for the extensive evidence that support these attributions, based on diction, parallel passages, metre, imagery, alliteration, staging and scene construction.
[7] See Parrott's Introduction and Notes.
[8] Wiggins 2013: Vol. III, entry 1064.
[9] See Meyer 1897: 142ff. When Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* was revived for a court production in 1633, Thomas Heywood's prologue made apology for its outmoded fashion.
[10] Parrott 1910: 688-9. Peele's anti-Catholic animus might be in evidence too, when the corrupt Bishop of Mentz is tricked, comically, into an unintentional noble self-sacrifice (4.2).
[11] Against this, it might seem odd that Edward is called Prince of Wales in the play, given that the title was not fully established until later, as depicted in *Edward I*; Henry III had, however, previously conquered part of north Wales and given the territory to his son.

(5.1.122): *Edward I* shows the heroic, doting king, 'cumber'd with' a Spanish wife, Elinor of Castile, a woman of erotic charm and power, but also manipulative and murderous. Might the ear-boxing scene that so perturbs Edward in *Alphonsus* be an intertextual nod to *Edward I*, where the king's ears are boxed by his wife (Scene 6)? Like Alphonsus, Elinor repents at the last, confessing that she was unfaithful to Edward with his brother 'Uppon my bridal couch' (2475) on the night before their wedding. Here is another marriage in which Edward does not claim the first fruits. *Alphonsus* concludes with the Spanish tyrant binding two English royals into chairs to be tormented and killed (though in the end it is the tyrant himself who meets such a fate). This might recall the chair-binding murder that occurs in *Edward I* (Sc. 15), where Elinor uses a poisonous snake to kill her victim. The reference to a 'venomous serpent' (5.1.36) in *Alphonsus* might underline the connection. It is worth noting that a chair-binding murder also occurs in Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* (Act 1 dumb-show).

Alphonsus has various thematic and dramaturgical links to other plays by Peele, especially in scenes that border on absurdity and gratuitousness. Like *Titus Andronicus*, the play shows a violated daughter stabbed in an honour-killing by her maddened father (who likens himself to Virginius). Both plays see the introduction, late in the action, of a newborn child whose life is instantly in the balance. Grotesque cannibalistic motifs recur as well – the Thyestean feast in *Titus*, and the flinging of the baby's corpse as meat for its supposed father in *Alphonsus* (4.3).[12] And then there is the threat to marriage – this is not, of course, a uniquely Peelean theme, but he seems to have gone further than most playwrights of his era in the tragic foregrounding of sexual dilemmas and dangers, as evidenced by *Titus Andronicus*, *David and Bethsabe* and the lost play *The Turkish Muhammad and Irene the Fair Greek*.[13] Most tellingly, in my view, Peele makes frequent use of the upper tier for dramatic and often violent action – the *Alcazar* dumb-shows, the nose-slitting torture in *Edward I* (Sc. 5), a boy's fall to his death in *Troublesome Reign Pt. 2* (Sc. 1). Striking use of the gallery is also found in *Titus*, both in the turbulent opening and at the close when the Andronici offer

[12] It is worth noting that other Peele plays (*David*, *Troublesome Reign*, *Alcazar*) have plots in which the deaths of young children are either depicted or related.
[13] See Wiggins Vol. II, entry 803 for a probable plot.

to fling themselves from the walls.[14] The upper tier is used on three separate occasions in *Alphonsus* for scenes of murder and torture. No other playwright of the era makes such sensational use of this space.

None of these features can be taken in isolation as authorial fingerprints, but collectively they establish Peele as a prime candidate, especially when put alongside a number of striking verbal parallels – Charles Forker notes a dozen or so possible links to the 'putatively Peelean' *Alphonsus* in his edition of *Troublesome Reign*.[15] Wedding night tragedies were certainly being written in the 1630s, but to count *Alphonsus* among them would – with regard to diction, versification and dramaturgy – be to acknowledge a remarkable pastiche of an earlier mode. Peele is likely, I believe, to have had a major hand at *some* stage in the composition of the play – hence my treatment of it as a work that predates his death in 1596.

[14] The latter scene is Shakespeare's, but, as noted in Chapter 2, I agree with Vickers that the overall plot could well have been Peele's.
[15] Forker 2011: 22.

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Parenthetical line references throughout the study are to plays and poems published in the editions listed under 'Primary Works'; where no individual play or poem is named, the relevant text will be found in the collected works or anthologies of most recent date. Parenthetical page references throughout the study are supplied for 'Primary Works' where no line numbering is given.

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