CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Playing the whore: performing and contextualising prostitution in The Three Ladies of London
Authors	Semple, Edel
Publication date	2015
Original Citation	Semple, E 2015, 'Playing the whore: performing and contextualising prostitution in The Three Ladies of London', Paper presented at Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies: The Three Ladies of London in Context, Hamilton, Canada, 23/06/15 - 25/06/15.
Type of publication	Conference item
Link to publisher's version	https://threeladiesoflondon.humanities.mcmaster.ca/contexts/love.htm, https://threeladiesoflondon.humanities.mcmaster.ca/home/index.htm
Rights	© 2015, the author and Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies: The Three Ladies of London in Context post-conference website. Published as: Semple, E. (2015) 'Playing the whore: performing and contextualising prostitution in The Three Ladies of London', Performance as Research in Early English Theatre Studies: The Three Ladies of London in Context, the John Douglas Taylor Conference, McMaster University, Hammilton, Ontario, Canada, 23-25 June 2015.
Download date	2026-10-13 22:51:21
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/18541

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

EDEL SEMPLE[1]

Playing the Whore: Performing and Contextualizing Prostitution in *The Three Ladies of London*

This essay explores the literary and social contexts of prostitution in The Three Ladies of London. *Drawing on a diverse range of texts from the sixteenth century (including sermons, moral treatises, educational tracts, and drama), I investigate how Wilson represents prostitution not only as a moral evil, but also as a particularly social and economic failing. By the conclusion of* Three Ladies, *each of the female characters is identified as sexually transgressive; but how exactly is Lucre identifiable as a whore, why does Conscience turn to brothel-keeping, and how does the newly-married Love degenerate into Lust? Ultimately, I suggest that Wilson drew on and helped to establish a series of interlinked social, linguistic, material, and performative markers to delineate and stage the whore and that* Three Ladies *thus contributed to the development of the whore as a figure of dramatic interest.*

In the late-sixteenth century, the whore emerged as a popular figure on the stage and in printed works. By the end of James I's reign in 1625, dramatic representations of the illicit sex trade were common. For instance, the language of prostitution, from insults such as 'strumpet' and 'harlot' to jokes about sexually transmitted diseases, was pervasive; whores, bawds, and panders appeared in comedies, tragedies, and histories; and the whore even had top-billing as the eponymous protagonist in plays such as *The Patient Man and The Honest Whore* (1604)[1] and *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605).[2] The late Elizabethan period also saw a shift in the depiction of prostitution and the whore;[3] playwrights showcased the processes of the trade, its intricacies and trappings, and the whore, once an archetypal figure of vice – such as Wantonness in the interlude *Wit and Wisdom* (ca 1571-8) – became a distinctly individualized character.[4] Written in 1581, Wilson's *Three Ladies* is not only on the cusp of these changes, but also contributed to them and, in particular, to the development of the whore as a figure of dramatic interest.

[1] Edel Semple (e.semple@ucc.ie) is lecturer in Shakespeare Studies in the school of English at University College Cork.

From the very beginning the play depicts Lucre as sexually transgressive. In the opening scene, Love and Conscience express their concern that 'Lucre's lust lascivious' (1.24) will overthrow them.[5] When the band of vices approach Love and Conscience, the women reject their suit; Dissimulation's bawdy blessing piques Lucre's interest, however, and they engage in witty banter (2.202-7). Lucre's, Love's, and Conscience's response to the vices is clearly used to mark the women as either virtuous or wicked, but a moral lesson is also expounded. Lucre admits the vices to her company and the eventual harmful repercussions of this decision expose the weight placed on female honour; ultimately, one immoral woman instigates the downfall of the virtuous women and men of the play.

If, thus far, Lucre's association with prostitution has been somewhat implied, then her revelation that her grandmother was 'the old Lady Lucre of Venice' (2.216) firmly connects her to the trade. Early modern literature often depicted Italy as a place of vice, of luxury, and sensuality, and showed prostitution as an Italian transgression *par excellence*.[6] Furthermore, Venice was not only a maritime force and site of international trade in this period – and hence a suitable abode for old Lady Lucre – it was also renowned for its courtesans; these women were famed throughout Europe for their wealth, beauty, and good breeding, and often featured in English travellers' accounts of Venetian society.[7] Venice was also unique among Italy's cities as its 'red-light district was at the center of the city, right within its commercial heart. ... Rialto was therefore characterized as a center of trade, usury, banking, and prostitution'.[8] Venice and courtesans were so synonymous in the period that, in Stephen Gosson's prose romance *The Ephemerides of Phialo* (1579), the principled character Philotimo even goes so far as to describe the city as 'a colledge of Curtezans'.[9] Lucre's ancestry, then, would be a clear indication to Wilson's audience that her immorality was of a sexual as well as an economic nature. Lucre's name and her hiring of Usury also connect her to the illicit sex trade. As Gordon Williams notes, a range of texts from the period jokingly

compared usury and bawdry as lewd occupations that led to 'breeding', with profit or children as the offspring.[10] Moreover, money itself was often described as a procurer. For instance, in a pamphlet of 1622 John Taylor comments that 'of all Bawds, Gold is the Bawd indeed'.[11] In the didactic dialogue *A Modest Meane to Mariage*, from 1568, prostitution and materialism are also connected through names; at several points the printed text suggestively abbreviates the name of the prostitute Lucrecia to 'Lucres'. And so, through a conjunction of signs which link illicit economic and sexual transactions, Lucre is marked as a whore.

A wide range of sixteenth-century texts depicted whores as wilful and unrepentant sinners, driven by lust, avarice, and malevolence to sell themselves day and night. Lucre fits into this mould and no doubt helps to establish these traits as conventions on the stage. In Gosson's *The Ephemerides of Phialo*, Phialo tries to convert the courtesan Polyphile by showing her that her life is vile and sinful. He labels her a 'monstrous Epicure'[12] whose only aim is beastly pleasure.[13] In *Three Ladies*, having described Lucre as 'a whore, full of deadly hate' (8.53) earlier in the play, when they next meet Conscience calls the audience's attention to Lucre's clear enjoyment of her illicit profession: 'I think it is no pain to thee, that thou still playest the whore' (10.53-7). Lucre's flirtations with Mercadorus serve as further confirmation of her identity. She promises the Italian merchant that if he lies, imports trifles to England, and cheats his customers, then 'you shall win me to your will' (3.52). When Lucre learns that Mercadorus is already corrupt she is delighted: 'Now I perceive you love me, and if you continue in this still, / You shall not only be with me, but command me when and where you will' (3.59). Lucre's language here is suggestive. One of the meanings of 'will' in this period was 'carnal desire or appetite'.[14] Thus, Lucre is not only titillated by Mercadorus's malevolent conduct, but she also intimates that she shall reward him for it: she will satisfy his 'will', his sexual desires, anywhere at any time.

As her name and identity as a whore suggest, Lucre is often motivated by greed and malice. In her discussion with Mercadorus, she shows a marked interest in the material, detailing the useless 'baubles, coloured bones, glass, beads' that should be imported for the supposedly desirous 'gentlewomen of England' (3.44-5). Later, she sends Mercadorus to bring 'some new toys' from Africa and Asia and specifically requests 'Such trifles as you think will please wantons best' (5.92-3). Not content with ruining Conscience and Love, Lucre has set her sights on damaging English businesses and compromising the morals of the entire female population through the corrupting influence of foreign luxuries.

While *Three Ladies* establishes Lucre as a figure of vice early on, we witness the decline of Conscience and Love over the course of the play. Driven to poverty by Lucre and her henchman Usury, Conscience becomes Lucre's bawd and Love, in desperation, marries Dissimulation, only to degenerate into the monstrous creature Lust. (Contrary to the biblical teaching and moral treatises of the period, there is no salvation in marriage for Love; within its confines she finds only damnation.) Preying on the poor and the weak is a key component of Lucre's modus operandi, and it is clear that this is something she relishes. Having won Conscience over, Lucre gleefully admits that economic hardship and acquisitiveness make for easy pickings: 'for poverty and desire of Lucre do force them follow my mind' (10.122). Lucre's view that her victims are compelled by need as well as greed has a bearing on the play's depiction of the 'fall' of Conscience. Reduced to a state of destitution, Conscience wanders the streets as a lowly broom-seller; she even breaks into direct address to plead with the audience to 'buy of my broom' (8). Whereas moralistic pamphlets, such as *The blasinge of Bawdrie* (1574), caution virgins not to imitate immoral women who run away from home and become thieves or vagrants, 'Wandrynge abroade ... with a Staffe and a Bagge',[15] in *Three Ladies* the immoral actions of others reduce Conscience to this wretched state. Her eventual move into the sex trade is, therefore, not shown in an unsympathetic light or one-

sided manner. In contrast to Lucre, Conscience is not depicted as a 'bad' woman; rather, she is a victim of circumstance motivated by dire economic need and it seems that, as in Dekker's *The Honest Whore, Part 2* (1605), one of the villains of *Three Ladies* is the 'cunning Bawd (Necessity)' (4.1.135).[16]

In his depiction of prostitution as a socio-economic problem, Wilson was most certainly influenced by the realities of life in the capital. As in medieval France and Italy, prostitution had been licensed in medieval London.[17] By 1546, however, the crime and disorder associated with the civic brothels was so great that Henry VIII ordered their closure and brought an end to the 'ordinance for the governance of the stews in Southwark'. These ordinances had been passed by Henry II in 1161 and they regulated prostitution by granting certain rights to and imposing restrictions on brothels and their workers. With the 1546 prohibition of commercial sex, rather than being limited to one area, prostitution spread across the city and became thoroughly illicit, falling into the hands of 'private' whores and keepers. Despite the closure of the licensed brothels, the illegality of prostitution, and sporadic campaigns against the industry, prostitution thrived and continued relatively unabated well into the seventeenth century.[18] Factors such as the growing number of poor, economic hardship, and a rapidly expanding urban population with an increasing number of migrants, all contributed to the continuance and spread of prostitution in the capital. The disproportionate number of single women in London was also a contributory factor. At any given time most adult women were single (being widowed or having never married),[19] and at least one fifth of England's men and women never married, and in urban areas around one third of the female population were single women.[20] Add to these statistics the fact that a half to one third of the female populace was made up of women who were poor or completely destitute,[21] and it is clear that the sizeable sums that could be earned from prostitution would surely have appealed to some women. The long period between sexual maturity and marriage

also likely facilitated prostitution, as young men sought an outlet for their desires.[22] Thus, with a burgeoning number of potential customers and potential workers, poor economic conditions, as well as inadequate and irregular control, prostitution was a persistent and prominent vice in the capital.

Despite the ease with which poor women like Conscience could fall into the trade, *Three Ladies* still makes Lucre work and deploy her charms to win the desperate woman to her will. For the stereotypical bawd, charisma and deception are her stock-in-trade. The speaker of *The blasinge of Bawdrie* repeatedly complains of the bawd's devilish verbal power and her harmless appearance; modestly but finely dressed as 'a woman[n] of substa[n]ce', with a countenance as 'smooth as it were a Saint', the bawd easily leads virgins astray with her 'subtyll ungracious counsell'.[23] Functioning as a bawd in this scene, Lucre is similarly cunning in her treatment of Conscience, manipulating her through kindness and by applying subtle pressure. Having announced that Love is to marry Dissimulation, Lucre shows 'great liberality' (10.71) in buying all of Conscience's brooms. Poor, abandoned by her only friend, and surprised by Lucre's charity, Conscience quietly resigns herself to what appears to be her inevitable fate: 'I think you lead the world in a string, for everybody follows you, / And sith every one doth it, why may not I do it too?' (69-70). In one swift move Conscience, a paragon of virtue, becomes a bawd, one of the most hated figures and worst of sinners in the early modern imagination.[24]

The ruination of Conscience is clearly a central element in the plot and a selling-point of the play, as its full title suggests: *A right excellent and famous Comedy called the three Ladies of London. Wherein is Notablie Declared and Set foorth, how by the meanes of Lucar, Love and Conscience is so corrupted, that the one is married to Dissimulation, the other fraught with all abhomination*. The moment of Conscience's defilement was also memorable for its contemporary audience as, writing in 1582, the anti-theatricalist Stephen Gosson

recalled Conscience's transformation from a gentlewoman to a 'filthie, corrupt, spotted, and defiled' bawd.[25] Conscience's degeneration is signalled not only by her new view of and sycophantic pandering to Lucre – 'My good Lady Lucre, I will fulfil your mind in every kind of thing' (10.81) – but also by her appearance. Although Lucre is a whore, here she acts as a bawd and ironically exploits Conscience, her soon-to-be bawd, like a new whore; the new recruit is to be taught the ways of the brothel and must take on a new appearance.[26] While Conscience is distracted counting the money she must use to turn her 'poor cottage' into a sumptuous brothel (74), Lucre spots her face with paint from a 'box of all abomination' (89). Once again, the downfall of a good person exhilarates Lucre: 'The more I do behold this face, the more my mind doth vaunt' (106). While Lucre's sense of achievement at ruining this paragon of physical and moral perfection is evident, her speech also reveals that she is attracted to Conscience. In this desire, Lucre is perhaps a precursor to the Bawd in Shakespeare and Wilkins's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (ca 1607-8), who lusts after the virgin Marina, the brothel's newest acquisition (4.2; 4.5). Having detailed Conscience's Petrarchan beauty, Lucre is compelled to touch her new acolyte: 'I cannot choose but kiss thee with my lips that love thee with my heart' (10.114). The printed playtext provides no scene directions here, but if Lucre does kiss Conscience, notably the kiss happens only when Conscience is fully spotted. Depravity is clearly attractive to Lucre and the kiss confirms Conscience's corruption, contributing to the 'defilement' which Gosson notes. Conscience's abrupt announcement that she has finished counting the coins, moreover, possibly prevents the kiss. In this case, her single-minded attention to the money provides the audience with firm evidence that her corruption is complete.

The spotting of Conscience also connects her to early modern stereotypes of the whore and points to a very real danger of sex work in the sixteenth century: venereal disease. Medical tracts, moral treatises, and popular literature scapegoated prostitutes as the origin for

and carriers of the pox. Henry Bullinger's *The Christian State of Matrimony* (1541), for instance, declared that the source of syphilis was common knowledge: 'stories do testify that the French pox came of an harlot into the world through whoredom'.[27] In *The Nice Wanton*, an interlude from ca 1550, the wilful and licentious Dalilah becomes 'a strong whore' (l.465).[28] The play graphically describes the consequences of her choice; having caught the pox 'at the stews' (461), she enters emaciated, crippled, and near blind, she has lost her hair, suffers from palsy and lives in constant pain. Her body, as Dalilah puts it, is 'Stuff'd with diseases' (264) and the knowledge that she 'sinned wilfully' (283) gnaws at her conscience. Like Dalilah's disfigurement, the spotting of Conscience serves several purposes. Her spotting is presented at once as symbolic of her moral corruption; an illustration of the physical perils of sex work; a fitting punishment for her sin; and a warning to the audience against illicit sex. While jokes about the effects and spread of the pox are common in later plays, from *Measure for Measure* (1604) to *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), Conscience's infection is uniquely presented as a horror that threatens the health of the city. At the play's conclusion, Judge Nemo interrogates Conscience to learn how she became 'so spotted' (17.63). To his mind, her pose of virtue has apparently been so convincing that she has deceived and ruined a countless number of men: 'many by thee hath been greatly infected' (65).

Although men are obvious participants in the vices the play condemns, the finale trial scene shows a notable gender bias. While Dissimulation, Fraud, and the other male vices escape judgement, the three ladies must stand as symbols of all immorality and are duly tried for their actions. Indicted for adultery, robbery, and murder, Lucre initially defies her accusers, claiming that she has been slandered, but this very response condemns her.

LUCRE My soul craves revenge on such my secret foes,
And revengement I will have, if body and soul I lose.

JUDGE NEMO Thy hateful heart declares thy wicked life (17.28-30)

Lucre's vindictiveness serves as a final confirmation of her immorality and it is a trait that later dramatists would borrow. In her vengefulness, she is a precursor to murderous courtesans like Franceschina in *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605) and the Italian sisters in *The Fleer* (ca 1606). Interrogated by Judge Nemo, Conscience confesses to bawdry and 'lascivious living' (48) and so condemns herself, Lucre, and Love. Judge Nemo's sentence for the unrepentant is severe: he banishes Lucre to 'the place of darkness' where she will weep, wail and burn in fiery hell (56), and Love, now deformed into Lust, is to 'feel like torment with her' (91). This punishment accords with the dire warnings against whoredom and adultery which Wilson's audience would have known well. The popular *Homily Against Whoredom and Uncleanness* (1547), for instance, declares 'woe be to them which, neglecting their salvation, give their minds to so filthy and stinking sin, to so wicked vice, and to such detestable abomination',[29] and it warns of the grim consequences of whoredom: health, wealth, and reputation are destroyed, and the soul will suffer 'most grievous and intolerable torments'.[30]

Conscience arguably receives lighter treatment as she is to be imprisoned until 'the day of the general session' (17.99). This jail sentence may point towards a common punishment for London prostitutes in the period – detention and hard labour in the Bridewell prison – but it may also be a mock Last Judgement. While it seems that reform is impossible for Lucre (59), Conscience's faith and show of remorse means that, although she is to languish in prison until the end of days, she does not despair of salvation: 'after judgement I hope of God's mercy (74). In trusting in God's grace, Conscience is linked to other popular dramatic representations of female sinners who transgress but, through faith, reform, such as Mary Magdalene, the eponymous heroine of Lewis Wager's *A new Enterlude … of the Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (1566).[31] These concluding images and statements,

then, are a means to affirm the didactic and moralistic aims of *Three Ladies*; vice is all too common, sin is all too easy, but God is the ultimate judge and his grace is the means to salvation.

In its presentation of prostitution as a complex socio-economic problem, in its real-world portrayal of early modern sex-work, and in its staging of individualized, humanized transgressors, *Three Ladies* highlights changes in and makes some original contributions to dramatic representations of whoredom in the period. And, while *Three Ladies* can certainly be described as a play of its time, it has much to offer a modern audience. Wilson's representation of sex-workers and carnal sin is at times heavily moralistic, not to mention misogynistic, but in showcasing prostitution as more than a spiritual crime, his play is at times surprisingly modern and it leaves a lasting impression.

Coda

My contribution to the 'Performing Gender' seminar and my thinking on Wilson's play was invigorated and enhanced by the production of *Three Ladies* and the insightful and challenging discussions of previous seminars (and coffee breaks). What follows represents only a small sample, a snapshot, of some of the issues that were explored during the seminar and a few of the ideas that the conference has since inspired.

Early in the seminar discussion the contributors and audience considered the extent to which Wilson's characters are allegorical. In the McMaster production, the three ladies were both morality figures familiar from older forms of drama and distinctive characters operating within a clearly realised social world. The performance thus lent support to readings by Helen Ostovich in 'Doubling Love' and by Jessica Swain in the rehearsal blog. Indeed in the programme notes, Peter Cockett observed that a blended performance style of 'clowning' and psychological realism was central to the production. This choice of performance style meant

that Conscience, for example, was a noticeably individualized symbolic type; the audience were aware of her specific, personal struggles and her emblematic function simultaneously, it was not a case of 'either/or'.

In the McMaster production, the use of the two stage entrances, the circular movement of the actors around the stage, and the system of doubling highlighted the urban setting of *Three Ladies* and the fluidity of identity in this space. The play shows the boundary between vice and virtue to be disturbingly porous (as Ostovich notes in 'Doubling Love'), a fact all too apparent to the audience as, for example, we saw Cathy Huang enter embodying Love, exit, and re-enter as Lucre, and later saw Roxana Teymourian (Conscience) playing Love newly deformed into Lust. Wilson's audience would certainly have recognized that such duality and sudden metamorphoses are made possible by and in the city, and they might themselves have taken on new roles, adapting and shifting their identities to respond to changes in fortune, new opportunities, or chance encounters. In the play world, virtue and vice do not exist in isolation; rather Wilson forces the embodiments of these abstractions together to show that the self is made and remade through its interaction with others. As the opening exchange between Conscience, Love, and Fame suggests, the good must strive to retain their integrity in a busy, crowded metropolis where nothing is constant, duplicity is rife, and Lucre 'rules the roost' (1.19). That Wilson has Conscience and Love fail in this endeavour demonstrates his understanding of the challenge presented by urban living and the power of socio-economic forces to transform the identity of even the very best of humanity.

The spotting of Conscience is a key scene in *Three Ladies* and it proved to be of recurrent interest in discussions of the McMaster production. In my essay, I suggested two possible stagings of Lucre's kiss, which would have different implications for the characters; the kiss might be homo-erotic, proving Lucre's attraction to corruption and Conscience's defilement, or the kiss might be prevented by Conscience's avid focus on her new wealth,

which would confirm that, like the rest of London, she was in Lucre's thrall. The McMaster production presented a third option: having finished spotting Conscience's face with an oily black paint, Lucre delivered a chaste kiss to her cheek, leaving a glaringly bright red lipstick mark on Conscience's pale skin. (Interestingly, this rendering of the scene emerged from a consideration of practicalities; the actors themselves plumped for the kiss to be on the cheek, and Roxana Teymourian noted that, during some performances, the black paint daubed on her lips ended up in her mouth so limited contact was preferable.) The kiss then was not a moment of lust, but a demonstration of the power of Conscience's purity and '[fine] soul' (10.113); Lucre was almost overwhelmed – for a brief second it seemed that she could be redeemed by her proximity to such virtue – but she quickly mastered herself. As members of the audience observed and as noted in some of the essays on this website, Lucre is largely inactive and undesiring; instead, she provokes desire in others and prompts them to action on her behalf. This ability of wealth to stir up desire and inspire action would seem to be in Ben Jonson's mind when he has Volpone observe: 'Riches, the dumb god that giv'st all men tongues; / That canst do nought, and yet mak'st men do all things' (1.1.22-3).[32] When Lucre met Dissimulation, Fraud, Simony, and Usury in McMaster's *Three Ladies*, she appeared aloof and detached, but she almost absent-mindedly touched the men as she moved around the stage; as the men quivered, near-fainted in ecstasy, and turned to the audience to share their joy, Lucre's power to give 'all men tongues' and make them do anything was comically confirmed.

During the seminar discussion, the question of why Love becomes Lust and how the audience is prepared for this metamorphosis arose. Although Dissimulation and Love/Lust never appear on stage as a couple, the vice has designs on the virtuous lady from early on. With a sinister glint in his eye, McMaster's Dissimulation made a point of ordering Simplicity to return Love's gown, which she had offered to Usury as part of her rent (7.36).

By the end of the scene however, he had altered his plans: 'I'll hie me after [Simplicity], that I may send back Lady Love's gown, / For I would not have Love brought quite out of town' (7.46-7). In the sixteenth century, courtship practices could blur the lines between legitimate and illicit sexual liaisons; in exchanging gifts and tokens of love it could be unclear whether marriage was being promised, or whether these favours were an inducement towards extra-marital sex. Ostensibly then, Dissimulation plays the role of suitor here, but in returning Love's gown he demonstrates his power over the ladies' fortunes (Love is clothed only because he intervenes) and he curries favour with the penurious lady. In Scene 15, Love blames herself and her new spouse for her monstrous degeneration. She first refers to the 'bad intent' (15.7) which led her to marry, suggesting that her deformation results from her immoral motivations for marriage. Moralizers and church leaders supported three traditional functions for marriage – the provision of legitimate offspring for the Church and state, the avoidance of fornication, and mutual companionship – and Love's interests apparently do not tally with such noble aims. (Dissimulation's interest in marriage is also self-serving and he offers no love to his wife: see 11.40-50.) Love/Lust also proposes that her transformation is a result of her husband's immorality; she must be called 'lascivious Lust, / Because unto Dissimulation I did repose such trust' (15.9-10). Love stands here as a *feme covert*; upon her marriage many of her legal rights and responsibilities were surrendered to her spouse as, in the prevailing religious and legal ideologies, through matrimony two individuals became one body, with the husband as the head. Thus, through association and under the rule of her superior but corrupt spouse, Love degenerates into an immoral version of her self: two-faced Lust. Finally, it is possible that Love becomes 'lascivious Lust' due to her discovery of the joys of sex. According to many moralisers conjugal sex, or the debt of 'due benevolence' as it was often termed, required regulation because if it was over-desired or enjoyed too often, or if a spouse provoked desire in their partner for the sake of pleasure only, then it would

become indistinguishable from fornication. For divines such as William Whately, Robert Cleaver, and Henry Bullinger, as Coppélia Kahn observes, 'sex belongs within marriage, to ward off the threat of whoredom – yet also threatens to become a sort of whoredom within marriage'.[33] Despite the apparent legitimacy of conjugal sex then, Love's new identity as Lust could thus arise from her or her husband's sexual activities. These excessive pleasures might even leave a visible mark on Love; as Sarah Johnson suggested during the seminar Q&A, Love's swollen, hooded head could be staged as, or hint at, a monstrous pregnancy, marking her as corrupt as Conscience's spotting marked her as fallen.

Finally, the play's closing scene was also a subject of much discussion during the conference. In her essay, Claire Jowitt reads the ending as patently anti-feminist and argues that, ultimately, the female characters are punished for being female. In the final scene of the McMaster production, I suggest, the (all-male) authorities – Judge Nemo, the Clerk, and the constable Diligence – clearly wanted to punish the male vices but were prevented by their own incompetence and by the vices' cleverness. Diligence, for instance, was apologetic as he explained to the increasingly exasperated judge that Dissimulation, Fraud, Simony, and Usury were still roaming the streets; his embarrassment at the fact that the *real* criminals had evaded justice was palpable. Having targeted the 'wretch Dissimulation' (17.4) and his kinsmen in the crackdown on vice, Nemo found 'but three prisoners' (2) detained; he had little choice but to resignedly call for the women to be brought to the bar. Thus, presented as the only criminals the inept authorities could catch, the women stood as scapegoats trotted out to bear the full force of the city's frustrated legal and civil demands.

Notes

[1] Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, 'The Patient Man and the Honest Whore', Gary Taylor, and John Lavagnino (eds), *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Oxford, 2007).

Middleton and Dekker's *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* has often been known as simply *The Honest Whore*, but the Oxford Middleton restores the full title to the play. The play proved so successful that Dekker wrote a sequel the following year.

[2] John Marston, *The Dutch Courtesan*, ed. M.L. Wine (London, 1965).

[3] David Mann, *Shakespeare's Women: Performance and Conception* (Cambridge, 2008). From the late 1580s on, prostitution was 'featured in nearly a quarter of the adult repertory' (167). Karen W. Pirnie, in '"As she saith": Tracing Whoredom in Seventeenth-Century London from Bridewell to Southwark' (The U of Alabama, 1998), observes that 'thirty-six such characters [whores, bawds, etc. appear] in plays dated between 1600 and 1610, compared to fewer than twenty in the previous five decades' (2).

[4] Writing in *Shakespeare's Women*, Mann notes that prior to 1586 plays rarely depicted prostitution in any detail and representations of the whore were generally 'little more than moral abstractions' (Mann, *Shakespeare's Women*, 167).

[5] Robert Wilson, 'The Three Ladies of London', Lloyd Edward Kermode (ed.), *Three Renaissance Usury Plays* (Manchester, 2009), 79-163.

[6] For instance, in his *Historie of Italie* (London, 1549, repr. 1561), an influential source of information on Italy in the sixteenth century, William Thomas notes that 'Rome is not without 40,000 harlots, maintained for the most part by the clergy and their followers' (39).

[7] For example, Thomas Coryate's travelogue, *Coryats Crudities* (London, 1611), provides us with a fascinating description of his encounter with a Venetian courtesan and includes a woodcut illustrating the meeting. The prominence of the sex trade in Venetian life was no doubt on Roger Ascham's mind when, writing in the mid-1560s, he recalled his sojourn in Venice: 'I saw in that little time, in one Citie, more liberty to sinne than ever I hard tell of in [London] ... it was there, as free to sinne, not onely without all punishment, but also without

any mans marking'. Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster or plaine and perfite way of teaching children* ... (London 1579), 29.

[8] Laura Tosi,'Shakespeare, Jonson and Venice', Shaul Bassi and Laura Tosi (eds), *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare* (Farnham, 2011), 157. For more on prostitution in early modern Italy, and Venice in particular, see: Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon, *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Oxford, 2006); Laura J. McGough, *Gender, Sexuality, and Syphilis in Early Modern Venice: The Disease that Came to Stay* (New York and Houndmills, 2010); Margaret F. Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Chicago, 2012); Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford, 1989); and Andrew Hadfield, 'Shakespeare and Republican Venice', *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare*, 67-82.

[9] Stephen Gosson, *The Ephemerides of Phialo* (London, 1579), A5r.

[10] Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespeare and Stuart Literature*, 3 vols (London, 1994), 3.1463.

[11] John Taylor, *A Common Whore With all these graces grac'd: Shee's very honest, beautifull and chaste* (London, 1622), B5v.

[12] Gosson, *Ephemerides*, I1r.

[13] Ibid, I4r.

[14] 'will, n.1.', *Oxford English* Dictionary (*OED*) *Online* (accessed 12 November 2014).

[15] R.C. Citizen, *A New Booke Intituled The blasinge of Bawdrie, Daylie procured by Beldame B. Principall Broker of all Iniquitue* (London, 1574), B1r.

[16] Thomas Dekker, *The Honest Whore, Part 2*, Fredson Bowers (ed.), *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, 4 vols (Cambridge, 1964), 2.133-228.

[17] Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), 495.

[18] Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991). Archer notes that in the late 1570s 'the Bridewell authorities embarked on a determined crack-down on commercial sex in the capital, which remarkably included the prosecution of clients, some of them prosperous citizens' (211). Prostitution was thus topical in 1581 and it is possible that the 1570s campaign lies behind Lucre's desire to relocate the brothel to Conscience's house, which is apparently located in a quieter area where the poor neighbours can be relied upon to conceal the business (10.96).

[19] Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London, 1993), 8-9.

[20] Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), 2-3.

[21] Sara Mendelson, 'Women and Work', Anita Pacheco (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford, 2002), 60.

[22] Moulton, *Before Pornography*, 497.

[23] Citizen, *blasinge of Bawdrie*, A8r.

[24] For more on bawds in early modern drama see: Mario DiGangi, *Sexual Types: Embodiment, Agency, and Dramatic Character from Shakespeare to Shirley* (Philadelphia, 2011); Edel Semple, 'Rethinking Transgression with Shakespeare's Bawds', Rory Loughane and Edel Semple (eds), *Staged Transgression in Shakespeare's England* (New York and Houndmills, 2013).

[25] Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (London, 1582), D2r.

[26] See 'bawd, n.1' and 'whore, n.1'. *OED Online* (accessed 1 January 2015). A bawd is defined as a person who is 'employed in pandering to sexual debauchery; a procurer or procuress' (OED *n.*1). Although the term 'whore' has a complex history in early modern literature, the OED's definition is of use here: 'A woman who prostitutes herself for hire; a prostitute,

harlot ... More generally: An unchaste or lewd woman' (OED *n.*1a and 1b). For a fascinating discussion on this topic see: Kay Stanton, '"Made to write 'whore' upon?": Male and Female Use of the Word "Whore" in Shakespeare's Canon', Dympna Callaghan (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2000), 80-102.

[27] Henry Bullinger, 'The Christian State of Matrimony', Kate Aughterson (ed.), *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England* (London, 1995), 107. See also Desiderius Erasmus, *A Modest Meane to Mariage, pleasauntly set foorth by that famous clarke Erasmus Roterodamus, and translated into Englishe by N.L*. (London, 1568).

[28] 'The Nice Wanton', Glynne Wickham (ed.), *English Moral Interludes* (London, 1976).

[29] 'Homily Against Whoredom and Uncleanness', Lloyd Davis (ed.), *Sexuality and Gender in the English Renaissance: An Annotated Edition of Contemporary Documents* (London, 1998), 8.

[30] Ibid, 15.

[31] Lewis Wager, *A New Enterlude, neuer before this tyme imprinted, entreating of the Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene not only godlie, learned and fruitefull, but also well furnished with pleasaunt myrth and pastime, very delectable for those which shall heare or reade the same* (London,1566).

[32] Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, ed. Robert N. Watson (London, 2003).

[33] Coppélia Kahn, 'Whores and Wives in Jacobean Drama', Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker (eds), *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama* (London, 1991), 249.