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Punishing Adultery in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*

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In 1608 when Thomas Heywood published *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, a domestic tragedy centering on a man's discovery and punishment of his wife's unfaithfulness, adultery was officially an ecclesiastical offense which, if detected by the church authorities, could land the culprit in a penitential white sheet before the parish congregation. As Martin Ingram explains, however, adulteresses and their lovers were usually presented to the courts only when their liaison became a matter of public knowledge and scandal. It appears that husbands who privately discovered their wives' affairs were not inclined to report the adulterous couple to the churchwardens (unsurprising considering the ridicule popularly inflicted on the cuckold), and that on the whole, "female adultery was probably regarded locally as primarily a matter of household discipline. It was the husband's duty to restrain his wife's behavior, and local officers were inclined to allow him ample opportunity to do so before resorting to legal action."[1] Such is the situation in Heywood's play, where the wronged husband does not even consider the option of ecclesiastical justice before imposing his own brand of "restraint" on his adulterous spouse. But the husband who had to deal with an unfaithful wife was not left entirely to his own devices, for where the churchwardens stepped aside, a host of marriage handbooks, domestic conduct guides, and moral treatises proclaimed the correct and Christian thing for him to do. While a number of readers have sought to contextualize *A Woman Killed with Kindness* within various contemporary discourses, it appears that none of Heywood's critics has consulted the body of literature

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which sheds the most light on what a seventeenth-century Englishman like John Frankford ought to do with an adulterous wife: the Renaissance marriage manuals and conduct books, including one written by Heywood himself.[2]

Examining marriage manuals from Heinrich Bullinger's *The Christen State of Matrimonye* (1541) to William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* (1634), and focusing specifically on the authors' treatment of female adultery, Karen Newman posits a change from the sixteenth century to the seventeenth in the way these texts represent wives, and the "shameful wife" in particular. According to Newman, the lengthy diatribes against adultery and whoredom found in earlier authors like Bullinger give way to "a form of management by erasure: the shameful wife is literally unrepresented, she is not written." Placing the transition around the publication of William Perkins's *Christian Oeconomie* (Latin 1590; English translation 1609), she argues that women stopped being represented as powerful and dangerous sexual beings, and instead,

> women's subjectivity was regulated and constructed in line with ideologies of femininity most useful to the apparatuses of state power. Whereas in the early works women are controlled from the outside and their sexuality is openly recognized, even respected because powerful, in the later handbooks, sermons, and the like, the representations of women as dutiful and companionate and the suppression of their sexuality fashion a different feminine subjectivity.[3]

Although it is true that the long and vituperative condemnations of adultery begin to disappear from marriage handbooks around the end of the sixteenth century, it is difficult to agree with Newman that the later Puritan authors simply ignore the adulterous wife "as a form of management by erasure." A quick glance through Gouge, Perkins, and William Whately in *A Bride-bush*—all of whom she cites as perpetrators of this erasure—reveals that all of them deal concretely and specifically with the treatment of adultery in both sexes and the options available to the wronged partner. While the church's official condemnation of sexual sin, Thomas Becon's "Sermon against Whoredom and Uncleanness" (1549), denounced adultery as an offense deserving death, the pragmatic advice of the marriage manuals generally fell more into line with the church's practices than with its rhetoric: as the ecclesiastical courts absolved adultery through purgation or penance, so the conduct-book authors counseled the wronged

spouse to exercise Christian charity and forgive a penitent partner his or her adultery.[4]

Several conduct-book authors do echo Becon's stance on the justice of the death penalty for marital unfaithfulness; however, remarks of this sort tend to be rather perfunctory, a sharp but brief reproof amid the more humane and reasonable solutions which are set out at greater length. Whately, for example, warns his readers that "the party so transgressing hath . . . laide himselfe open (if the Magistrate did as God's law commands) to the bloody stroke of a violent death," but then proceeds enthusiastically to commend forgiveness of an erring spouse:

> in case the man or woman have offended once or so, through infirmity, and yet beeing convicted, shall by manifest outward tokens, testifie his or her repentance, and sure desire of amendment, then it is meet and convenient that this offence bee by the yoke-fellow passed by: for the love of the married couple should be very fervent and abundant, and therefore able to passe by great, yea the greatest wrongs, so farre as it may with safe conscience be done.[5]

Perkins goes a step further than Whately, advising that the reconciling couple should involve the local parish in their process of repentance and forgiveness:

> Howbeit, if the innocent partie be willing to receive the adulterer againe, in regard of his repentance; lest hee should seeme to favour and maintaine sin, and to bee himselfe a practiser of uncleannesse, he is to repaire to the congregation, and declare the whole matter to the Minister, that he may understand the parties repentance, and desire of forgivenesse.[6]

And in 1634, Gouge—whose other ideas about "domesticall duties" place him among the most authoritarian of seventeenth-century moralists—goes so far as to state that the innocent partner "ought" to forgive a repentant spouse, and that divorce is only advisable when there is "just exception to the contrarie."[7] He supports this injunction by drawing a moral from Christ's treatment of the woman taken in adultery:

> *Seeing that Christ said to an adulteresse, I condemne thee not, goe and sinne no more, who cannot conceive that an husband ought to forgive that which he seeth the Lord both of husband and wife hath*

> *forgiven: and that he aught not to account her an adulteresse whose fault he beleeveth to be blotted out, by the mercie of God, upon her repentance?*[8]

Far from "erasing" the adulterous wife and refusing to acknowledge female sexuality, or calling on the law to erase her through death, Gouge counsels the wronged husband to consider her transgression erased by God.

Among the domestic manuals of the early seventeenth century stands one which is perhaps the most relevant to an analysis of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. This is a conduct book of sorts written by Heywood himself—*Gunaikeion* (1624). While the book might be seen merely as an encyclopedic collection of stories about women, from goddesses to witches, martyrs to murderesses, Heywood evidently intended it to be educational as well as entertaining, stating in the preface that "Wives may reade here of chast Virgins, to patterne their Daughters by, and how to demeane themselves in all Conjugall love towards their Husbands: Widowes may find what may best become their solitude, and Matrons those accomplishments that most dignifie their gravitie." Laura G. Bromley does mention this work to indicate—quite rightly—that Heywood was no misogynist, but completely ignores that particular section of it entitled "Of Adulteresses."[9] Oddly enough, neither she nor any other critic appears to have considered *A Woman Killed with Kindness* in the context of what can most reasonably be taken as Heywood's personal views on female adultery and its punishment—the avowedly didactic introduction to his tales of adulteresses, and the tales themselves. And, as I will show, a brief exploration of this part of *Gunaikeion* soon reveals a Heywood who supports the charitable treatment of adulteresses endorsed by contemporary conduct books, and who is most unlikely to endorse the punitive behavior of Master Frankford.

As in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, Heywood's focus in *Gunaikeion* is largely on the punishment of adultery. After a short denunciation of sexual sins at the beginning of the chapter on "Women Incestuous, Adulteresses, and such as have come by strange deaths" (the latter have little to do with the former, except that all their stories are "tragic," and thus can be placed together under the muse of tragedy, Melpomene), and a section on incestuous women, he begins his section on adulteresses with the following:

> *Aulus Gellius* in his first booke *de Mortibus Atticis* cites these words out of *Varroes Menippea*, The errours (sayth he) and

> vices of the wife are either to be corrected, or indured; he that chastiseth her makes her the more conformable, he that suffers her, makes himselfe the better by it: thus interpreting *Varroes* meaning, That husbands ought to reprove the vices of their wives, but if they be perverse and intractable, his patience (though it prevaile not with them) yet much benefits himselfe: yet are not their insolencies anyway to be incouraged, because it is a dutie exacted from all men, to have a respect to the honour of their houses and families: Besides, such as will not be reformed by counsell are by the Lawes to be punished.[10]

Upon discovering his wife's adultery, then, a man is to exercise patience and attempt to reform her by "counsell"; only when patience and reproof fail, and the sinner is proved "perverse and intractable," is punishment "by the Lawes" in order. Heywood's advice here bears resemblance to Whately's, who recommends forgiveness if the adulterous spouse repents and promises to reform, but feels that the innocent party is obliged to seek separation and "complaine of the sinne" if "the party transgressing shall continue in the begunne fault, and declare himselfe irreformable."[11]

What punishments does Heywood deem suitable for an unrepentant and intractable adulteress? Death at the hands of the husband, it would seem, is entirely out of the question, for "much is that inhumane rashnesse to bee avoided, by which men have undertooke to be their owne justicers, and have mingled the pollution of their beds with the blood of the delinquents, *Cato Censorius* reckons such in the number of common executioners, and counts them little better than bloodie hangmen."[12] Furthermore, Heywood does not go on to reassign the job of executioner to the public authorities, by trotting out the old list of death penalties found in Bullinger and Becon. Instead, the punishments for adultery he describes include how "Lysias the famous Orator declaimed against his wife in a publike oration," how Cumaean adulteresses were made "a spectacle of scorn" by being led about on an ass, and how Parthians were dissuaded from adultery by the threat of taxes. We also hear the story of how a man avenged himself on his wife's lover by sleeping with *his* wife (a method of which Heywood seems less than approving, since it caused "a bloodie and intestine warre almost to the ruin of the whole cittie"), and he tops off the list with an account of how a certain ruler "amerced the matrons of Rome for their adulteries, and extracted from them so much coine at one time, as builded

the famous Temple of Venus neere to the great Circus."[13] The complete absence of bloodshed from this very humane list of punishments is somewhat redressed in a much later part of the book: in a chapter dedicated to women's rewards and punishments, we find "The punishment of Adulterie." A number of harsher penalties are rehearsed here, though without much relish ("By *Solon*'s Lawes, a man was permitted to kill them both in the act that so found them . . . In Iudea they were stoned to death. *Plat. Lib. 9. de Legibus* punisheth Adulterie with death"), and certainly without any exhortations to revive them. And notably, although all the other deeds for which rewards and punishments are described focus entirely upon women, the punishments for adultery are visited on an equal number of men, from an unfortunate fellow who was hanged by his testicles, to the adulterous King Lotharius who was merely excommunicated.[14] Heywood's apparent rejection of the sexual double standard is generally shared by contemporary conduct-book authors, who agree with Gouge that although a woman's adultery may cause more inconvenience, "the sinne of either partie is alike [for] God's word maketh no disparity betwixt them."[15]

As for the actual stories of adulteresses, the punishments they describe are as varied as the women who incur them. Unlike the introduction, the stories do not appear to be explicitly didactic—a fact which may in itself call into question a rather common image of Heywood as an old-fashioned, straightforward moralist. Thus we are given an account of "Messalina the wife of Claudius Tiberius," an inveterate strumpet who murdered anyone foolish enough to refuse her favors, without any mention of misfortunes that befell her for her sins; instead, Heywood's final remark to her story—"a strange patience it was in an emperour to suffer this"—is quite the understatement, for Messalina would have tried the patience of the most liberal of modern husbands. In the anecdote which follows, Heywood "commends" a man less tolerant than Claudius, who has the sense to report his adulterous wife and her lover to the church courts. The tale ends, however, with a joke at the expense of the husband, and the wife getting off scot-free.[16] There are tales which involve the deaths of adulterous women, and those which relate only the deaths of their lovers; an erring wife who died of remorse is juxtaposed with an adulteress who had her husband killed and suffered the novel punishment of having her "tail sing" whenever she opened her mouth.[17] Clearly, the only conclusion that can be drawn from this pot-pourri is that Heywood is hardly a rigid doctrinaire who would insist on death as the wages of female sexual sin. One story which *can* be

reasonably assumed to be exemplary—it is considerably longer than any other, and appears as the next-to-final item of the entire work—makes it clear that Heywood does not require women to expiate sexual transgressions with their lives. Entitled "A convertite rewarded," it relates the rather heart-warming tale of a prostitute who is persuaded by a gentleman to repent and reform her life. She performs no penance, undergoes no torments of the soul for her past sins; rather, the gentleman finds her a comfortable position in service to a good family, where she is so well esteemed that the husband chooses to marry her after his wife's death. He eventually leaves her a rich widow, whereupon she has the kindness to marry her first benefactor (now in reduced circumstances) and restore him to wealth and happiness.[18] The message is clear: repentance and a subsequently clean life wipe sin—even sexual sin—right off the slate. As with Heywood's first remarks on adulteresses, the erring woman who is amenable to reproof and counsel requires no punishment.

What, then, are we to make of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, the story of a woman who shows remorse for her adultery while she is committing it, and heartfelt repentance and shame the moment she is discovered, yet who is sentenced to death in a rather ingenious manner by a husband who considers himself the last word in righteous retribution? I believe that if the play is an exemplum, it is an exemplum of how *not* to treat a repentant adulteress. As I will explain, Heywood does not depict Frankford as the model husband, nor does he endorse his sentence on Anne as the ideal solution to their problems; rather, he uses both the main plot and the subplot to show how specious "kindness" is no substitute for true charity and forgiveness.[19]

A number of critics have viewed John Frankford as a model of male virtue, calling his shortcomings, as R.W. Van Fossen does, "human failings" that serve only to make his nobility the more compelling.[20] Other readers, however, do dwell more closely on those failings: we hear from David Cook that Frankford is "an ordinary, limited man," incapable of the "greathearted emancipation from emotional constraint which would allow him to forgive," and John Canuteson agrees, insisting that Frankford's failure immediately to forgive his repentant wife "immediately removes him from consideration as a Christian gentleman."[21] Frankford is also found to have flaws apparent even before the main crisis: Frederick Kiefer notes that even at his wedding, he is "gracious and kindly [but] . . . slightly aloof," a man who "seems loath to acknowledge and express emotion";[22] Kiefer, Canuteson,

and Leanore Lieblein all point out, with varying degrees of emphasis, that he regards his wife primarily as a possession;[23] Patricia Meyer Spacks detects in his welcome of Wendoll a tragic lack of perception, which "can be as disastrous in its effects as failure of goodness."[24] If, for the moment, we disregard Frankford's capacity for forgiveness, the other aspects of his character readers have found questionable—his attitude on his wedding day, his estimation of what a wife is, his misguided affection for Wendoll—all seem to add up to one central problem: Frankford fails to grasp the essential concept of the companionate marriage.

The idea that marriage is for companionship as well as procreation, a "total relationship of minds, spirit and body" as well as an economic union, was generally accepted in Renaissance times.[25] Heywood himself advises that "the sacred institution of marriage, was not onely for procreation, but that man should make choice of a woman, and a woman to make election of a man, as companions and comforters one of another as well in adversitie as prosperitie . . . Marriage . . . becomes the civile man, to which though hee be not compelled by necessitie, yet it makes the passage of life more pleasing and delightful."[26] And that the marriage of Anne and John Frankford ought to be such a one of close mutual friendship is expressed by Sir Charles at their wedding:

> There's equality
> In this fair combination; you are both scholars,
> Both young, both being descended nobly.
> There's music in this sympathy, it carries
> Consort and expectation of much joy.
>
> (i.66-70)[27]

The first words Frankford speaks, however, reveal that his concept of marriage is somewhat different: "Ay, you may caper, you are light and free; / Marriage hath yok'd my heels, pray then pardon me" (i.10-11). And while he finds reasonable contentment in his possession of "a fair, chaste and loving wife, / Perfection all, all truth, all ornament" (iv.11-12) to accompany his attributes of birth, wealth, and learning, it soon becomes clear that he does not consider his wife a genuine companion. Once married, he proceeds to seek out someone to fill the place that his wife ought to hold: as surely as if he had placed an ad in the "companions wanted" column, he looks about him and decides upon Wendoll:

> his carriage
> Hath pleas'd me much; by observation

I have noted many good deserts in him—
He's affable and seen in many things,
Discourses well, a good companion.

(iv.27-31)

The very deliberateness of his selection reveals that this is no ordinary friendship, grown out of long acquaintance and compatibility. Frankford chooses to take a bosom friend the way that most men choose a mate, and the nature of their relationship is not to be the kind of sociable acquaintance we see early on between Sir Charles and Sir Francis, but a carefully planned live-in companionship:

I know you, sir, to be a gentleman
In all things, your possibilities but mean;
Please you to use my table and my purse—
They are yours.
. . . . . .
Choose of my men which shall attend on you,
And he is yours. I will allow you, sir,
Your man, your gelding, and your table, all
At my own charge; be my companion.
. . . . . .
Come, sir, from this present day
Welcome to me for ever.

(iv.63-84)

The language that Wendoll uses to describe his relationship with Frankford reveals how far the husband has displaced the wife who ought to be his "companion and comforter," his "second self." It is Wendoll who, figuratively, has become "one flesh" with Frankford:

He cannot eat without me,
Nor laugh without me. I am to his body
As necessary as his digestion,
And equally do make him whole or sick.

(vi.40-43)

Contemplating his desire for Anne, Wendoll condemns his unfaithfulness to his friend in terms which we might expect to hear coming from Anne herself:

Hast thou the power straight with thy gory hands
To rip thy image from his bleeding heart?

> To scratch thy name from out the holy book
> Of his remembrance, and to wound his name
> That holds thy name so dear, or rend his heart
> To whom thy heart was join'd and knit together?
>
> (vi.45-50)

However, we hear nothing of the sort from the wife who presumably could most legitimately speak of hearts "join'd and knit together." When Wendoll reveals his desires to her, she speaks once of "the love I bear my husband" (vi.141), innumerable times of the love her husband bears his friend, but never of any love and esteem her husband has for her, or of the pain that *her* disloyalty would bring him. And perhaps she has no reason to do so. She has seen her husband take Wendoll into his house to be his inseparable companion, has observed how he cherishes his friend as almost a member of his body, "even as his brain, his eyeball, or his heart" (vi.115), has been obliged to convey her husband's message that this man should "make bold in his absence and command / Even as himself were present in the house; / . . . And be a present Frankford in his absence" (vi.76-79). The obvious irony in this last line, of course, is that Wendoll makes himself a "present Frankford" in ways that surpass the invitation; but there is also the irony that it is Anne who by rights should have the command of the house, as her husband's deputy when he, the master, is away. Perhaps she feels her displacement as she protests to Wendoll, "I am his wife / That in your power hath left his whole affairs" (vi.123-24), aware that the name of wife and the power to tend to her husband's affairs in his absence have been unjustly separated. Without a strong sense of her own place and value in her husband's life, but with an overwhelming knowledge of how he loves his new companion, it is not surprising that Anne falters when Wendoll phrases his seduction to sound as if her only alternative to injuring her husband is . . . injuring her husband. She can submit to Wendoll, assured by him that "the augmentation / Of my sincere affection borne to you / Doth no whit lessen my regard of him" (vi.144-46), or she can reject him and report his advances to Frankford, a choice that would sever Frankford from his dearest friend (vi.131-36). Faced with such a decision, the "labyrinth" Anne finds herself in may be more complicated—to her, at least—than a simple matter of fidelity or infidelity.

But suggestions that Frankford allows Wendoll to usurp Anne's place, or that Anne submits under a vague sense that she may be at Wendoll's command along with the rest of the household, are never made explicit in the text. Throughout the play, Heywood

refuses to provide Anne with any truly clear motivation for her adultery. According to Kiefer, he does so because "he recognized that to give Anne a credible motive—any motive—for adultery would compromise his intent. . . . To have supplied a motive would have meant explaining and thus, implicitly, condoning Anne's transgression, something Heywood would not do."[28] All this is true enough: whatever motives he may hint at, Heywood cannot be said to condone or justify Anne's actions. But the lack of explicit motivation also works in the opposite way, depriving the audience or reader of ammunition with which to attack Anne further. There are very few explanations that could not be turned into condemnations: had Anne sinned out of attraction, or even love, for Wendoll, she would be open to accusations of wanton lust; had she been enticed with gifts, she could be called a common whore. By largely avoiding the question of motivation, Heywood presents the act of adultery in its simplest form, unobscured by either mitigating or damning circumstances, so that we may focus without distraction on the events that follow—Anne's repentance and Frankford's "kindness."

Although Anne's motives for committing adultery may be debatable, her remorse and repentance for the sin are unmistakable. So far is Anne from being hardened by her sin, or even from taking the least enjoyment in it, that our sense of her participation in the entire affair is one of sadness, misgiving, and regret. Her awareness of—and dismay at—her wrongdoing begin at the moment of her seduction, when she unhappily feels her soul wandering in the "labyrinth of sin" (vi.161), and last until her final act of adultery. On the night she is discovered, she pleads for her husband to stay home—not as a facade of innocence, but apparently from a sincere desire not to be subjected to Wendoll's temptations. Or has the affair now moved into the realm of coercion? After Wendoll has made shameful advances to her in the presence of Cranwell, Anne reluctantly submits, saying:

> You have tempted me to mischief, Master Wendoll;
> I have done I know not what. Well, you plead custom;
> That which for want of wit I granted erst
> I now must yield through fear. Come, come, let's in.
> Once o'er shoes, we are straight o'er head in sin.
> (xi.110-14)

Anne's claim that she "yield[s] through fear" is never further developed, but the suggestion that she is somehow *afraid* of Wendoll (it is hard to imagine what other "fear" would impel her

to sin), adds to our sense that she is entangled in a situation which she heartily regrets. Wendoll's gloating—"My jocund soul is joyful above measure; / I'll be profuse in Frankford's richest treasure" (xi.115-16)—only points up Anne's utter *lack* of joy in the affair, and emphasizes her entirely passive, even unwilling, role in it.

Once discovered, it is only natural that such a notably unhappy adulteress should be extravagantly repentant. And Anne is. Lieblein explains that, "as is usual for sinners in domestic tragedies, Anne recognizes her sin and begs for divine mercy. However, Anne's realization is of greater consequence, because her repentance comes before rather than after her punishment."[29] From her first speech, Anne is so penitent that she barely hopes for forgiveness:

> O by what word, what title, or what name
> Shall I entreat your pardon? Pardon! O
> I am as far from hoping such sweet grace
> As Lucifer from Heaven. To call you husband—
> O me most wretched, I have lost that name;
> I am no more your wife.
>
> (xiii.78-83)

To emphasize the depth of Anne's remorse (and, perhaps, the response required from Frankford), her lines are phrased to recall the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).[30] As he feels unable to claim the name of son to the father he has wronged, she laments that she has lost the name of wife and the right to call Frankford her husband. "I am not worthy," she says, echoing the biblical phrase, "that I should prevail / In the least suit, no, not to speak to you, / Nor look on you, nor to be in your presence" (xiii.101-103). That Anne thinks herself unforgivable only makes her contrition the more poignant, for although we acknowledge her guilt, we have seen her behavior throughout the affair reveal a woman far less loathsome than the "base strumpet" she sees herself to be.

Bromley argues that Anne's self-castigation implies that she herself "sees the justice of her punishment" and would consider a reconciliation to be dishonorable. Quoting the lines "He cannot be so base as to forgive me, / Nor I so shameless to accept his pardon" (xiii.139-40), she claims that Anne "recognizes that her husband cannot, with honor, fail to cast her off."[31] I would suggest, rather, that when Anne speaks those words, she is not *rejecting* forgiveness, but reconciling herself to the realization that Frankford is not going to forgive her. Directly before her speech, he has shamed her before her children, and declared, in essence, that she is unfit for any further contact with them:[32]

> Away with them, lest as her spotted body
> Hath stain'd their names with stripe of bastardy,
> So her adult'rous breath may blast their spirits
> With her infectious thoughts. Away with them!
> (xiii.124-27)

Following this diatribe, he has shut himself up in his study to ponder and plan what he describes as her "sentence." There is no such thing as a "sentence" of forgiveness. And so, with her own extreme sense of guilt obliging her to justify anything her husband does, Anne rationalizes to herself that forgiveness would be "base."

Similarly, Henry Hitch Adams's quibble that she is not truly sorry for her sin because "she is not yet fully prepared to turn repentantly to God" seems to me to miss the point.[33] True, Anne does not explicitly beg God's forgiveness in this scene, but the circumstances hardly require such a speech. It is Frankford who towers over her, demanding explanation and preparing to mete out judgment, and it is Frankford's forgiveness that is Anne's—and our—immediate concern. Her desperate claim that she would, to restore her honor in her husband's eyes, "hazard / The rich and dear redemption of my soul" (xiii.137-38) (the basis for Adams's objection) does not show that she has "no clear conception of the value of salvation,"[34] nor does it qualify the sincerity of her repentance. The fact is that she should not be obliged to make that terrible choice between Frankford's forgiveness and God's salvation. And tragically, as I will show, that is exactly the choice that her husband places upon her.

Having established that Anne bears little resemblance to those "perverse and intractable" wives who, according to Heywood, "are by the Lawes to be punished," let us examine the punishment which Frankford nevertheless sees fit to inflict on her. He does not kill his wife outright, but in terms of contemporary laws and practices, his self-restraint is less an act of great generosity than of basic human decency and common sense. As Ronald Huebert convincingly demonstrates, the notion that "a deceived husband had the right to kill an adulterous wife"[35] is considerably more widespread among twentieth-century critics than among seventeenth-century judges:

> The most recent of the critics . . . supports his assertion by appealing to the work of a social historian, Keith Thomas, who speaks of "a well established tradition that a husband could lawfully kill an adulterous wife caught *in flagrante delicto*" (268). But the tradition alluded to here is a very old one

> indeed. The legal authority cited by Thomas is Pollock and Maitland's *History of the English Law Before the Time of Edward I*: "There are signs that the outraged husband who found his wife in the act of adultery might no longer slay the guilty pair or either of them, but might emasculate the adulterer" (2:484). What we have here is a tradition that seems to have been dying out in the thirteenth century, but that somehow prevails in the seventeenth nonetheless. I find it remarkable that the scholars who maintain this position don't cite a single instance of a man who actually killed his unfaithful wife and who was legally exonerated. They do cite the case of a man from Essex who caught his wife in the act, stabbed her in the heart, and was hanged in 1602.[36]

When Frankford decides not to stab the pair "with all their scarlet sins upon their backs" (xiii.46), he is saving himself as well as their souls. His odd choice of word—or telling slip of the tongue—when he tells Anne "I'll not martyr thee" (xiii.153), may also point to the fact that, should he kill his wife, public opinion would view her, not him, as the sympathetic victim of injustice.

But Frankford manages to kill his wife nevertheless. Deliberating upon her "sentence" in his study, he formulates a way to do so without implicating himself—he will simply require her to commit suicide. And so he pronounces his judgment upon her:

> My words are regist'red in Heaven already;
> With patience hear me: I'll not martyr thee
> Nor mark thee for a strumpet, but with usage
> Of more humility torment thy soul
> And kill thee even with kindness.
>
> (xiii.152-56)

Frankford's phrasing clearly expresses that his "kindness" is no more than the substitution of psychological brutality for physical: rather than "marking" her body in a way which would bring shame upon himself (as a cuckold or as a murderer) as well as on his wife, he chooses a less visible, but equally destructive "torment."[37] The penalty he decrees is, quite plainly, a death sentence, and the ironic twist he gives to the proverb "to kill with kindness" (which prior to Heywood had simply warned against over-fond indulgence) reveals Frankford taking a kind of cruel satisfaction in his revenge. Cranwell, who functions throughout the play as a neutral commentator, tries to interrupt—seemingly in protest—when Frankford pronounces the sentence; Sir Francis, on the other

hand, who plays the villain's part in the subplot and evidently possesses a cruel streak of his own, approvingly points out that there is little difference between Frankford's course and a more direct blood-letting:[38]

> My brother Frankford showed too mild a spirit
> In the revenge of such a loathed crime;
> Less than he did, no man of spirit could do.
> I am so far from blaming his revenge
> That I commend it; had it been my case,
> Their souls at once had from their breasts been freed;
> Death to such deeds of shame is the due meed.
>
> (xvii.16-22)

I will return to Sir Francis and the subplot's comment on Frankford's "kindness" shortly, but here I wish to point out that Heywood clarifies Frankford's intention to drive Anne to suicide by showing that he wishes precisely the same retribution upon Wendoll:

> Go, villain, and my wrongs sit on thy soul
> As heavy as this grief doth upon mine.
> When thou record'st my many courtesies
> And shalt compare them with thy treacherous heart,
> Lay them together, weigh them equally,
> 'Twill be revenge enough. Go, to thy friend
> A Judas; pray, pray lest I live to see
> Thee Judas-like, hang'd on an elder tree.
>
> (xiii.70-77)

Wendoll, of course, has no intention of following in Judas's footsteps and killing himself out of remorse, and Frankford does not have sufficient power over him to ensure that he does. But Frankford does have that power over Anne. Her life may not be legally at his disposal, but psychologically, she is completely in his hands. Abject and guilt-ridden, utterly submissive and obedient after the brief "insubordination" of her adultery, she carries out his sentence to the letter, even echoing the opening line of his decree in the message she sends him:

> Last night you saw me eat and drink my last.
> This to your master you may say and swear,
> For it is writ in Heaven and decreed here.
>
> (xvi.63-65)

Unfortunately, one of the less pleasant side effects of suicide is eternal damnation. Anne's despairing exclamation, "Nay, to whip but this scandal out, I would hazard / The rich and dear redemption of my soul" (xiii.137-38) turns out to be sadly prophetic. Several critics, however, have claimed that despite the usual association of suicide with damnation, the circumstances of the play cause us to ignore emotionally what we accept intellectually (that suicide leads to damnation), and consider Anne's self-starvation as a Christian act leading to grace. Rowland Wymer argues that because the method of her suicide resembles religious "fasting and penances," and since "the idea that voluntary death atones for sin has an emotional force in Christian thought which leaps over the careful categories of theology," we are enabled to see Anne as saved, despite the fact that "redeem[ing] herself from sin by her death is a strictly untheological notion."[39] This argument, however, is persuasive only if we accept that the idea of penance is both theologically sound, and, in the context of the play, emotionally compelling. I would say that it is neither. Not only is penance—or any notion that one can find salvation through works—unacceptable to Protestant doctrine, but, since its underlying principle is to atone for physical indulgence through physical abstinence, it is, on an emotional level, peculiarly unsuited to Anne. Since we have seen Anne conduct her "indulgence" without a trace of pleasure, there is no satisfaction, no sense of poetic "balance" to be gained from seeing her expiate it with further penance.

Somewhat more ambivalent than Wymer, David Atkinson notes that although Anne's self-starvation is strongly penitential, "all the same, she deliberately takes her own life, and while such an action is ethically acceptable in the Spartan setting of *The Broken Heart*, in Christian England it would still seem to amount to suicide, a sin of despair far worse than adultery."[40] He does go on to qualify this statement, however, by noting that a) Anne thinks she is achieving salvation, not damnation, and b) nothing in the play draws attention to her self destruction. The latter point, it seems to me, does not take into account the words of the honest servingman Jenkin, who unlike his less plain-spoken superiors, calls a suicide a suicide: "O sir, I can assure you there's no help of life in her, for she will take no sustenance. She hath plainly starved herself, and now she is as lean as a lath" (xvii.34-36). As for the former point, what Anne *thinks* she is doing is of little account. Adams's claim that Anne rejects the misconceptions embodied in her earlier statement about hazarding her soul's redemption, and through penance and contemplation comes to a correct idea of salvation, is

simply untrue.[41] Anne indeed alters her views about earthly honor and heavenly grace, but in a way which takes her *further* away from sound theology: she no longer simply values Frankford's forgiveness above God's, but now *conflates* the two, pleading to her husband,

> Pardon, O pardon me! My fault so heinous is
> That if you in this world forgive it not,
> Heaven will not clear it in the world to come.
>
> (xvii.86-88)

Tragically, the requirements for reconciliation which Frankford imposes on Anne (he only fully grants his forgiveness when he ascertains that her death is imminent) are at odds with the requirements of heaven, and with this misguided philosophy on her lips—"Pardon'd on earth, soul, thou in Heaven art free" (xvii.121)—the woman killed with "kindness" dies a suicide.

I do not intend to go into much detail with the subplot, but a brief account will illustrate how it provides a parallel to Frankford's actions, while making the spuriousness of such "kindness" and its evil effects fully evident.[42] Sir Francis, too, decides to "fasten . . . a kindness" (ix.66) upon the person who has wronged him, but in his case, the scurrilous, self-serving motives behind the "kindness" are obvious:

> shall I, in mercy sake
> To him and to his kindred, bribe the fool
> To shame herself by lewd, dishonest lust?
> I'll proffer largely, but, the deed being done,
> I'll smile to see her base confusion.
>
> (vii.80-84)

Even when he claims to be smitten by love for Susan, his designs upon her are the same. Unable to "tempt her with . . . gold" (ix.41), he comes up with the scheme to indebt her to his "kindness" of freeing her brother—a plan which he sums up with the wonderfully ambiguous phrase "In her I'll bury all my hate of him" (ix.72). Sir Francis, significantly, is considerably more villainous than his counterpart in the subplot's source, "Salimbene and Angelica": Salimbene is not personally involved in the long-past feud which ruins Angelica's brother; he has been deeply in love with the maiden for a long time, and would marry her were it not for the enmity between their families; most importantly, his act of kindness

stems not from any ulterior motives, but from a recognition of the injustice of carrying on old feuds and an unwillingness to watch the woman he loves endure "sutch heavinesse and dispayre" over her brother's suffering.[43]

Sir Francis, however, is no good-hearted Salimbene, and his particular brand of "kindness" spawns a sequence of morally questionable events. With what Spacks convincingly argues to be a "perverse concept of honor," Sir Charles places a monetary value on his sister's chastity—"A thousand pound! I but five hundred owe; / Grant him your bed, he's paid with interest so" (xiv.45-46)—and they both then plan to double-cross their creditor by having Susan kill herself before Sir Francis can enjoy his part of the bargain.[44] Mirroring the consequences of Frankford's "kindness" to Anne, the direct results of Sir Francis's "kindness" would be Susan's suicide; that the whole ugly situation ends in the kind of loveless marriage of social convenience deplored in Renaissance marriage manuals does not make things much better. Susan's consent to the match—"I will yield to fate / And learn to love where I till now did hate" (xiv.147-48)—reads like a declaration of defeat. It is a "happy ending" as dubious as all those pious remarks about salvation around the deathbed of the confused and suicidal Anne. And as Atkinson has pointed out, it is most ironically fitting that Sir Francis should congratulate Frankford on his methods.[45]

While there are few voices within the world of the play that speak out in opposition to the uncharitable "kindnesses" of Frankford and Sir Francis, the three instances of Heywood's *own* voice that are incorporated into *A Woman Killed with Kindness*—the title, the prologue, and the epilogue—all work to draw our attention to the fact that not all may be as straightforward as it seems. As I have already mentioned, the proverb "to kill with kindness," prior to Heywood, had simply referred to excessive—but genuine—kindness. The twist that Frankford gives the proverb reveals a glimpse of the sadism which lies beneath his moralizing; Heywood's use of the phrase for his title can be seen to point up the essential difference between the genuine kindness implied by the proverb and the unexpected cruelty which occurs in the play. Moving, as an audience would, from the title to the prologue, we are informed that we will be shown "a barren subject, a bare scene"—the subject of adultery and betrayal may certainly be described so, but is the play not also about Frankford's great magnanimity, his forgiveness, the salvation of Anne's soul? Or might this too, on closer examination, be "a barren subject, a bare scene"? The prologue

ends with a statement that resonates in the audience's mind throughout the play: "gentle thoughts, when they may give the foil, / Save them that yield, and spare where they may spoil." Whether or not the action which follows upholds these humane and "gentle" standards is left for each viewer, each reader to decide.

And the epilogue reveals that Heywood fully expected a multiplicity of responses:

> "Taste it," quoth one. He did so. "Fie!" quoth he,
> "This wine was good; now't runs too near the lee."
>
> Another sipp'd, to give the wine his due,
> And said unto the rest it drunk too flat.
> The third said it was old, the fourth too new.
> "Nay," quoth the fifth, "the sharpness likes me not."

Canuteson observes, "to some [Heywood] had probably created a quintessential adultery-revenge tragedy: A woman sins against a man with every good quality, and he kills her without even touching her, nay, ironically, with 'kindness' But to others, he has presented the possibility of dealing with a moral crisis by the use of the Christian code, and in particular, by forgiveness."[46] As I have shown, the idea that a repentant adulteress may be forgiven—indeed, in Gouge's words, *ought* to be forgiven—is one which finds support from contemporary conduct-book authors; that she should be "counselled," not killed, is the view Heywood espouses in *Gunaikeion*. When Frankford kills his penitent wife and calls it kindness, we are meant to see how far from charity his sentence really is.[47]

NOTES

[1]Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 253-55.

[2]Hardin Craig, in *The Enchanted Glass: The Elizabethan Mind in Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), pp. 128-36, explains the play in terms of Elizabethan psychology; Henry Hitch Adams, in *English Domestic, or Homiletic Tragedy, 1575-1642* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1943) analyzes its relation to popular theology. More recent studies include Leanore Lieblein's "The Context of Murder in English Domestic Plays, 1590-1610," *SEL* 23, 2 (Spring 1983): 181-96, a discussion of the "scandal sheet" sources of Renaissance domestic tragedies, and Laura G. Bromley's "Domestic Conduct in *A Woman*

Killed with Kindness," *SEL* 26, 2 (Spring 1986): 259-76, an argument for Frankford as a model husband, based on the contemporary "gentleman book." Although Bromley promises to deal with "Renaissance conduct books" (p. 260), she neglects those which specifically treat the problem of adultery.

[3]Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 15, 26-27.

[4]Thomas Becon, "A Sermon against Whoredom and Uncleanness," *Certain Sermons or Homilies* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1844), pp. 108-23. For a detailed discussion of the incongruity between Becon's homily and the contemporary punishment of adultery, see Ronald B. Bond, "'Dark Deeds Darkly Answered': Thomas Becon's Homily Against Whoredom and Adultery, Its Contexts, and Its Affiliations with Three Shakespearean Plays," *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 16, 2 (Summer 1985): 191-205. As Bond points out, Becon borrowed some of his text from Bullinger's *The Christen State of Matrimonye*, trans. Miles Coverdale (London, 1541), STC 4045, particularly the list of harsh punishments for adultery employed by other nations (p. 195). Both moralists use this list to support their claims that adultery ought to be a capital offense.

[5]William Whately, *A Bride-bush, or a Wedding Sermon* (London, 1617), STC 25296, p. 2. Similarly, Henry Smith's *A Preparative to Marriage* (London, 1591), STC 22685, briefly observes, "as for the Adulterer and the Adulteresse he [God] hath assigned death to cut them off," during a lengthy discussion of a more realistic alternative—divorce (pp. 108-11).

[6]William Perkins, *Of Christian Oeconomie; Or a Short Survey of the Right Manner of Erecting and Ordering a Family, According to the Scriptures*, trans. Thomas Pickering (London, 1609), STC 19677, p. 118.

[7]William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), STC 12119, p. 218. Of course, the "divorce" he refers to is merely a judicial separation "from bed and board" (*a mensa et thoro*), permitting neither partner to remarry. Both Ingram (p. 143) and Kathleen Davies in "Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage," *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, ed. R.B. Outhwaite (London: Europa, 1981), pp. 58-80, characterize Gouge as a rigid moralist who would be unlikely to take a radically lenient attitude towards any kind of marital misconduct; Davies describes his views on the subjection of women as "untypically strong" compared to his contemporaries (p. 63).

[8]Gouge, pp. 218-19. The italics are his.

[9]Bromley, p. 260.

[10]Thomas Heywood, *Gunaikeion; or nine bokes of various history concerninge women; inscribed by ye names of ye nine muses* (London, 1624), pp. 178-79.

[11]Whately, p. 2.

[12]Heywood, p. 179.

[13]Heywood, pp. 179-81.

[14]Heywood, p. 433.

[15]Gouge, p. 219.

[16]Heywood, pp. 181-82.

[17]Heywood, pp. 196-97.

[18]Heywood, pp. 458-62.

[19]See Robert Ornstein, "Bourgeois Morality and Dramatic Convention in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," in *English Renaissance Drama*, ed. Standish Henning et al. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press,

1976), pp. 128-41. My reading of the play shares several of Ornstein's views on Frankford's character and the injustice of Anne's death; however, although he believes that "Heywood deliberately creates the ambiguity of Frankford's mildness," he concludes that the play poses no "serious moral questions about Anne's guilt and suffering [or] about Mountford's and Frankford's motives" (p. 139). My essay argues that the play is constructed to make the reader or audience less than comfortable with Frankford's methods of punishing adultery.

[20]R.W. Van Fossen, introduction to the Revels edition of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (London: Methuen, 1961), p. xlv. Other critics who admire Frankford include Otelia Cromwell, in *Thomas Heywood: A Study in the Drama of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1928), Peter Ure in "Marriage and Domestic Drama in Heywood and Ford," *English Studies* 32 (1951), pp. 200-16, and Bromley, who claims that Frankford's ability to moderate his passions makes him the Renaissance model of the honorable English gentleman.

[21]David Cook, "*A Woman Killed with Kindness*: An Unshakespearian Tragedy," *English Studies* 45 (1964): 353-72, 360; John Canuteson, "The Theme of Forgiveness in the Plot and Subplot of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 2 (1969): 123-41, 136.

[22]Frederick Kiefer, "Heywood as Moralist in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 3 (1986): 83-98, 91.

[23]Kiefer, p. 91; Canuteson, p. 129; Leiblein, p. 190.

[24]Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Honor and Perception in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *MLQ* 20, 4 (December 1959): 321-32, 326.

[25]Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 158. Davies also provides a discussion of the companionate marriage.

[26]Heywood, p. 180.

[27]Quotations from the play are from the Revels edition of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, ed. R.W. Van Fossen (London: Methuen, 1961). Subsequent references to scene and line numbers will appear parenthetically in the text.

[28]Kiefer, p. 87.

[29]Lieblein, p. 193.

[30]Canuteson (p. 137) points out the allusion, but does not comment on it.

[31]Bromley, p. 273. Ornstein, while more aware of the play's ambivalences than Bromley is, makes a similar observation: Frankford may have "a tincture of sophisticated cruelty. . . . Yet who can accuse [him] of hardness when it is Anne, not he, who insists that her adultery is beyond pardon?" (p. 130).

[32] Frankford's decision to humiliate Anne in front of the children and servants would likely have seemed as cruel and unwarranted to a Renaissance audience as it does to us: both Gouge (pp. 383-86) and John Dod and Robert Cleaver, in *A Godly Form of Household Government* (London, 1614), STC 5382, p. 84, insist that under no circumstances is it permissible for a husband to rebuke his wife before her household inferiors.

[33]Adams, p. 150.

[34]Adams, p. 151.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ronald Huebert, "A Woman Killed . . . With Kindness?: Or How to Get Your Own Way and Be a Nice Guy Too," ACCUTE Convention, (Charlottetown, May 1992).

[37]See also Lieblein (p. 193) and Canuteson (p. 137). Both agree that Frankford's intention is to kill his wife.

[38]David Atkinson, "An Approach to the Main Plot of Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *English Studies* 70 (1989): 15-27.

[39]Rowland Wymer, *Suicide and Despair in the Jacobean Drama* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), p. 83.

[40]Atkinson, p. 25.

[41]Adams, p. 152.

[42]See also Cook (p. 363) and Ure (p. 204).

[43]"Salimbene and Angelica" is reprinted in the Revels edition of the play, pp. 103-15.

[44]Spacks, p. 328.

[45]See also Canuteson, p. 139.

[46]Canuteson, p. 127.

[47]I wish to thank Christina Luckyj, who advised me on this essay throughout its revisions. Thanks also to Ron Huebert for providing me with a copy of his ACCUTE conference paper on *A Woman Killed with Kindness*.