

The Homosocial Economies of "A Woman Killed with Kindness"

Author(s): LYN BENNETT

Source: *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, New Series / Nouvelle Série, Vol. 24, No. 2 (SPRING / PRINTEMPS 2000), pp. 35-61

Published by: Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43445306>

Accessed: 15-10-2019 17:18 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/43445306?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*

The Homosocial Economies of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*

LYN
BENNETT

Résumé : *Cet article reconsidère la représentation des relations entre masculin et féminin dans la tragédie domestique de Thomas Heywood. Il propose que cette pièce critique les réseaux « homosociaux » et leur dépendance de la circulation du capital féminin. Par contre, une solution moralement acceptable est également offerte, grâce aux personnages des serviteurs, surtout Nick. À la différence de l'action axée sur les personnages principaux de Frankford et Mountford, l'action associée aux serviteurs souligne la façon dont les économies homosociales accumulent du capital, d'autant réelle que symbolique, au dépens des femmes.*

In a 1959 essay, Patricia Meyer Spacks defended Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* against "derogatory comments" made by previous critics.¹ Demonstrating how the play's two plots and their respective women are intertwined through the themes of honour and perception, Spacks's defence of this "antisentimental" and "powerful"² drama marked an important step toward the play's reevaluation. *A Woman Killed* now attracts much more critical attention than it did when Spacks wrote her article, and recent readings have done much to confirm the play's unity and to show how *A Woman Killed* sympathizes with rather than condemns women.³ Even so, the jury is still out on whether the play is as unified as we think plays ought to be, and on whether Heywood's treatment of women indicates a proto-feminist intent. Though criticism has enhanced our appreciation of *A Woman Killed*, the play's defenders have not wholly succeeded in laying to rest the questions Spacks's article aimed to answer. But the work of Spacks and other critics has demonstrated that we cannot talk about one issue without also considering the other.

Though *A Woman Killed* may not be unified in the classical sense, it is unified in other ways. Critics have identified numerous connections between its two plots: some have shown how the bourgeois main plot and the aristocratic subplot are linked in their shared concern with class issues;⁴ some have identified various thematic similarities between Anne Frankford and her subplot counterpart, Susan Mountford;⁵ still others have noted the importance of male bonds throughout the play — or what one critic has recently called its “homosocial imaginary.”⁶ I would like to take this collective recognition further and suggest that the play’s dual plot structure and its treatment of women are more closely connected than has so far been acknowledged, and that this interconnection becomes most clear when the two plots are understood in terms of how their heterosexual relationships are shaped by male homosociality. As a social phenomenon, homosociality both shapes and is shaped by its social context: historical changes within the continuum of “male homosocial desire,” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out, are always linked with other, “more visible changes.”⁷ In Heywood’s play, those changes include the ways that patriarchal and class hierarchies responded to, even as they enabled, nascent capitalism. Given this socio-economic context, I would like to suggest that the communities of men, as they are depicted in both the Frankford and the Mountford plots, are really homosocial *economies* — economies because their bonds depend not only on shared worldviews but also on the circulation of capital, and homosocial because they not only exclude female participation but also use women as their most valuable form of capital.⁸

To varying degrees women function as exchangeable commodities in all patriarchal cultures. As Luce Irigaray has famously observed, “The trade that organizes patriarchal societies takes place exclusively among men. Women, signs, goods, currency, all pass from one man to another.”⁹ *A Woman Killed* depicts a society where trade is, as in Irigaray’s formulation, the transactional bond that defines its patriarchal nature and its necessarily homosocial economy. Women in such an economy, Irigaray goes on to suggest, exist “only as the possibility of mediation, transaction, transition, transference — between man and his fellow-creatures, indeed between man and himself.”¹⁰ The commodification of women does not, however, always involve the exchange of women for money or other property — a woman’s value may also be symbolic. Sedgwick makes this point when she claims that patriarchal heterosexuality involves “the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men.”¹¹ Karen Newman has shown that Jacobean woman, who was believed to be the metonymic “crown of her husband” and thus “a mark of the wearer’s honor or achievement,”¹² functioned very much as the kind

of symbolic capital Sedgwick describes. At the same time, Newman acknowledges, early modern woman also functioned as actual capital; thus she assumed at once the role of “consumer and consumed.”¹³

In Heywood’s play, as in Jacobean society, women can be seen to function in both ways. The Mountford plot depicts a version of the homosocial economy concerned primarily with the exchange of actual capital, an economy that allows for ultimate resolution because contractual terms of exchange are clearly defined, those terms are ratified by all male parties, and the objects of exchange — women included — explicitly function as actual capital. Such capital remains at least peripherally important in the main plot, where Frankford’s wealth enables, among other things, his marriage to Anne. But the Frankford plot does not concentrate on the circulation of actual capital. Rather, the play’s main plot depicts a homosocial economy wherein women function primarily as the kind of symbolic commodity Sedgwick and Newman describe. Because commodities that circulate within this system of symbolic exchange are not always tangible, both the nature of male friendship and the role of women are less clearly defined than within an economy based on actual exchange. In the homosocial economies of Heywood’s play, then, woman’s value as capital may be actual or symbolic, and the terms of her exchange may be clear or ambiguous.

The differences between the Frankford and Mountford plots also indicate that married and unmarried women play different roles within the homosocial economy.¹⁴ Prior to marriage, woman is exchangeable as a commodity that enables the circulation of actual property among men, whereas after marriage, woman is an ideal form of property. Because an early modern woman becomes a *feme covert* upon marriage, any actual value she may have becomes exclusively her husband’s.¹⁵ Since her actual value has already been consumed and is kept by the husband, a married woman is valuable only insofar as she enables the circulation of the husband’s symbolic capital within the homosocial economy. In this way, the subplot of *A Woman Killed* illustrates woman’s commodity function, while the main plot deals with the complications that ensue once woman passes from a commodifiable asset to a symbolic one. Such complications are, it seems, a result of the ambiguous status of woman, whose lasting value depends upon her being able to serve variously, depending on the context, as the mode of currency for the exchange of either actual or symbolic capital. Because this alternative mode of exchange centres on the circulation of symbolic capital, its terms of trade are unstable. The confusion that results from this ambiguity leads to Anne’s adultery and, ultimately, to her death. Though the homosocial economy is the motivating force behind the play’s action in both the Mountford and Frankford plots, their differing emphases allow for the two plots’

very different outcomes: the former ends in an apparently happy marriage, the latter in a pathetic death. Even so, both plots arguably critique the culture of commodity exchange they represent, and the result is what we might call Heywood's negative defence of women.

Though neither the terms nor the concepts were fully articulated in Jacobean England, we cannot today talk about capital or economies in the early modern period without also considering issues of class.¹⁶ The two plots of Heywood's play represent communities of different social classes: as many critics have observed, the Frankford plot depicts the upward mobility of the proto-bourgeoisie, while the Mountford plot features an aristocracy in decline. This distinction Richard Levin describes as the main plot's depiction of "bourgeois domesticity" and the subplot's location in "a higher stratum."¹⁷ To argue, as I am doing, that the main plot focusses on symbolic capital within the homosocial economy while the subplot depicts actual exchange within that economy does not necessarily coincide with notions we have about these classes. We would more likely assume, as Levin does, that the aristocracy of the Mountford plot would be more concerned with symbolic capital, the kind of intangible wealth that very much worked to distinguish the aristocrat from his social inferiors; we would also be more likely to imagine the bourgeoisie, the rising mercantile class the Frankfords represent, as a class more interested in acquiring and preserving actual capital.

Yet we might read such a reversal as directly reflecting social change in an era marked by what Rossini calls "the change from a feudal to any early capitalist economy,"¹⁸ one that saw the wealth of the mercantile class grow while many aristocrats lost their fortunes. Although his want of money does not entirely occlude abstract values such as honour and chastity, the Mountford plot's aristocratic Sir Charles does need to pay more attention to actual rather than symbolic capital. Conversely, as the representative of an ascending economic class, the bourgeois and socially ambitious Frankford has the luxury of turning his attention away from actual capital and toward accruing the kind of symbolic capital most often associated with the aristocracy. Frankford has no apparent money problems, but his marriage to the "noble"¹⁹ Anne suggests that he does have aristocratic aspirations. Though visible in other ways, the differences between these homosocial economies are most obvious in the ways they value women: Susan Mountford is most valuable to her brother as actual capital, while Anne Frankford's value to her husband is almost exclusively symbolic.

The Mountford and Frankford plots do dominate the play, and it does seem that Heywood wants us to focus on the issues they raise. Yet *A Woman Killed* also offers an alternative to the homosocial classes of the play's main and subplots — namely, the world of the servants. The servants do not

represent an economy so much as they represent a community, one whose bonds do not depend on the circulation of capital, either actual or symbolic. This distinction does, of course, have much to do with class; servants have very little actual capital, and, as a result, they also have very little symbolic capital. Yet Heywood's deliberate inclusion of a third and very different community, whose presence might seem unwarranted and even disruptive, suggests more than a desire to offer a complete picture of the social and economic hierarchy.

It is true that Frankford's servant Nick plays a crucial role in forwarding the action of the main plot, but Heywood could have written Nick into the play without the scenes depicting the world of the servants and Nick's interactions within it. The world of Nick and the servants, I will later show, offers a viable alternative to the capital-driven morality of the Frankford and Mountford plots. As Spacks remarks, the servants offer a contrasting ideal to the play's other characters in that they "both behave honorably and see truly," and they are able to do so because they are not preoccupied with honour and the perceptions of others. As I would put it, the servants are able to behave morally because they are not preoccupied with acquiring and circulating capital, including the kind of symbolic capital Spacks calls "honor." I would further add to Spacks's conclusion that the servants represent a community united by something other than the rites of economic exchange and the masculine commodification of women.

I

A Woman Killed with Kindness begins with the marriage celebration of Anne and John Frankford. The play's opening passages clearly set out the terms that define the homosocial economy of the Frankford plot. As noted earlier, the Frankford plot does not wholly dismiss the importance of actual capital, but it does focus on the ways that the bonds of homosocial community are sustained and broken through the circulation of symbolic capital. I will return to this point later, but first I will offer a reading of the subplot that identifies a homosocial economy whose emphasis is very different from that of the main plot: in the Mountford plot, the male community is united and divided primarily through a system of actual commodity exchange. The modes of exchange that characterize these variant economies are evident from the opening scene, which suggests that, in contrast with the important role marriage plays within the homosocial network of the main plot, such symbolic rites are not of much importance to the homosocial community of the Mountford plot. Though the opening scene takes place in the midst of the wedding festivities, Sir Francis and Sir Charles are not interested in cele-

brating with the others. These aristocratic men disdain “country measures” (i.84), and dancing to these tunes, Sir Francis observes, requires “small” skill producing nothing more than a “hall floor pecked and dinted like a millstone” (i.89).

The apparently bored Sir Charles proposes an activity more suited to his class, a hawking match involving bets of a hundred pounds. Hawking is an upper-class sport that possesses symbolic value in its association with the aristocracy, but this hawking match also has monetary value in the wager. It is, as well, an exclusively male ritual. For these reasons, Sir Charles’s proposal proves much more enticing than celebrating the heterosexual rite of marriage or partaking in the presumably heterosexual pastime of dancing: for these men, worthwhile activities are male-centred activities that yield tangible results. The hawking-match contract is mutually worked out and sanctioned by the match’s participants; as Sir Francis affirms, the agreement “holds on all sides” (i.113). These male relationships and their defining rituals are based on economic exchange, and the terms of exchange are explicitly defined. The men’s discussion suggests that male friendships are made over the exchange of actual capital, and that these exchanges are based on clearly delineated, contractually binding agreement. The latter part of the play’s opening scene thus provides a synopsis of the subplot’s homosocial economy, an economy that is the motivating force of its subsequent action.

The hawking match, however, ends in disaster. Just as the rites of the homosocial contract can unite this community of men, so can their bonds be readily broken over disagreement about the terms of exchange. In contrast with the amicable mood of the previous evening’s negotiations, Sir Francis and Sir Charles cannot agree as to what actually happened after the hawks were set loose upon their prey. Though their quarrel has much to do with the male prowess metaphorically represented by their hawks, their disagreement is ultimately centred on the impending exchange of money. The indignant Sir Charles insists that Sir Francis is deliberately trying to swindle him: “Why sir,” he tells him, “I say you would gain as much by swaggering / As you have got by wagers on your dogs” (iii.34–35). Homosocial accord is disrupted by contractual dispute; without the necessary accord, the usual system of social mediation collapses. Squabbling over the wagers disrupts the homosocial community, but the subsequent murders definitively break its bonds, and Sir Charles, having killed two of Sir Francis’s men, is quickly ostracized. Sir Charles immediately recognizes the seriousness of his offence and his newly marginal status: though he “came into the field with many friends,” he tells the sheriff, he is left with only his “dear sister” (iii.99–101). Sir Charles’s violation is an act of desecration, and he becomes a homosocial outcast whose only friend is a woman.

Sir Charles's exclusion from the homosocial economy seems assured as he goes on to spend the family fortune on his legal defense: "My life," he laments, "hath cost me all the patrimony / My father left his son" (v.18–19). Without the kind of capital needed to participate in actual exchange, Sir Charles's place in the homosocial economy is even more tenuous than it was immediately after the murders, and the opportunistic "false friend" Shafton sees a chance to gain from Sir Charles's misfortune. Made in accordance with the rites of homosocial contract-making, Shafton's loan is offered in what seem to be unambiguous terms, terms that are freely accepted by Sir Charles. As with the earlier contract, this one is also witnessed by other "gentlemen," who, we are told, come "and see it tendered down" (vi.57).²⁰

The duplicitous Shafton soon uses the contract against Sir Charles, demanding quick repayment in the form of the Mountford estate. Sir Charles, however, tells him in no uncertain terms that

I now the last will end and keep this house,
This virgin title never yet deflowered
By any unthrift of the Mountford's line.
In brief, I will not sell it for more gold
Than you could hide or pave the ground withal. (vii.22–26)

Within the male system of exchange, it appears, some forms of property can be deemed non-commodifiable, valuable only as symbolic capital. Social identity in this play is inseparable from property, and this "virgin" property is inextricably bound up with an aristocratic identity that comes through patrilineal descent; to use it as actual capital would be to lose its value as symbolic capital. A loss on this scale would likely shut him forever out of the male community that defines his ancestral past and thus his present social status.²¹ This type of symbolic capital, it appears, is as valuable an asset in this economy as actual capital. Sir Charles makes it perfectly clear that the Mountford estate is his, it is chaste, and it will remain so: he is determined not to part with the last of his inheritance, a piece of symbolic wealth that allows him to retain his aristocratic status and to hold, if only by refusal, a negotiating position within the homosocial economy.²² The metaphors used to describe this feminized piece of property confirm that women and real estate are both important objects of trade within that economy, even when they are not available for exchange. However, it soon becomes apparent that a woman's symbolic value is readily converted to capital of the actual kind.

When Sir Charles is rearrested for his debt to Shafton and powerless to help himself because he refuses to part with the estate, Susan is sent to petition his "kinsmen and allies" (vii.68). But Susan's attempts to negotiate within this homosocial world result in utter failure, a failure suggesting that

such a role is inappropriate for a woman who is really an object of trade within its economy. Susan's failure also reaffirms Sir Charles's necessary exclusion from a community whose bonds are defined through the exchange of capital. Sir Charles cannot belong because he has nothing left to exchange — at least nothing that interests his uncle Old Mountford, his friends Sandy and Roder, or his cousin Tydy. Roder denies their friendship, telling Susan, "now I neither know you nor your suit" (ix.25), while Tydy insists that "I am no cousin unto them that borrow" (ix.36). In this society, male relationships apparently do not exist without the possibility of economic exchange; as Susan later tells her brother, "our kindred with our plenty died" (x.70). The ability to participate in the homosocial economy evidently takes precedence over the bonds of family or friendship in defining a community.

Sir Charles still possesses something of exchange value — his sister Susan. Susan, however, vehemently rejects Sir Francis's offer of gold in exchange for sex and thus refuses to act as commodity. By so doing, she also impedes the possibility of her brother's reinstatement as a viable participant within the homosocial economy. Susan, it appears, would like to remain in her role as symbolic rather than actual capital; she is no more willing to sacrifice her virginity than her brother is willing to give up the family estate. Sir Francis, however, ignores Susan's refusal and insists on pursuing her, yet the more she scorns him, the more he is "wrapped in admiration" (ix.60). But Susan's pursuer also recognizes that sexual possession can be achieved only with her brother's approval and with the contractual exchange of one form of capital for another.

Sir Charles knows as well as Sir Francis that the latter wields enough economic power to absolve the former's debt and, additionally, to reverse the appeal for the huntsmen's deaths — whose lives, apparently, are now also commodifiable within the system of exchange. Sir Francis's desire for Susan will prove the means of restoring Sir Charles to a place within the homosocial community. To win her, he resolves, "I'll bury all my hate of him" (ix.73). Sir Charles, not yet aware of the terms of exchange, swears that he will not accept his sworn enemy's financial assistance:

Ha! Acton! O me, more distressed in this
Than all my troubles. Hale me back,
Double my irons, and my sparing meals
Put into halves, and lodge me in a dungeon
More deep, more dark, more cold, more comfortless. (x.87–91)

He changes his mind remarkably quickly, however, upon learning that he does have something he can exchange without incurring a debt to his sworn enemy. Sir Charles will not exchange the virginal estate, but he is willing to

barter his sister's chastity. Given his later approval of Susan's suicide proposal, it may be that Sir Charles is really challenging Sir Francis to descend to the level of actual exchange, even though his foe's nobility, like his own, is presumably also invested in the symbolic kind.

The estate certainly has some actual value, but it will retain its role as symbolic capital. Susan clearly has some symbolic value, for, as Orlin says, virginity in this play "is associated exclusively with male honor,"²³ but she will now function primarily as actual capital. Whether its value is symbolic or actual, feminine chastity can be either firmly owned in the form of a "virgin" estate or contractually exchanged like Susan's: "I have enough," Sir Charles decides, "Though poor, my heart is set / In one rich gift to pay back all my debt" (x.123–24). Legitimate membership in the homosocial community is acquired only through the exchange of commodities. Without something of worth to exchange, Sir Charles would continue to live in isolation, an imprisoned outcast ignored by his friends and relatives. To accept Sir Francis's offer without giving something in return would upset the homosocial equilibrium. He would thus remain as powerless as he became by accepting Shafton's loan: money in this play, as Lewis says, "always has strings attached."²⁴

Like other exchanges in this homosocial economy, this one is also sealed by a mutually endorsed contract. But the contractual agreement takes place only after we are again reminded of Susan's status as commodifiable property, a status she herself affirms when she estimates her own monetary value to be not five hundred but "a thousand pound" (xiv.43). Susan also knows that she is ultimately her brother's property to exchange as he sees fit. "I know," she finally tells Sir Charles,

These arguments come from an honoured mind,
As in your most extremity of need,
Scorning to stand in debt to one you hate,
Nay, rather would engage your unstained honour
Than to be held ingrate, I should condemn you.
I see your resolution and assent;
So Charles will have me, and I am content. (xiv.76–83)

Susan, aware that she is the last item of property her brother is willing to commodify, understands that his legitimate place within the homosocial community is ultimately more important than her chastity. Unlike the estate's chastity, whose preservation as symbolic capital is necessary to his future participation in the homosocial community, the conversion of her own chastity from symbolic to actual capital is necessary if Sir Charles is to regain

a recognized place within its defining economy; as Rossini observes, “this virtue is a mere commodity,”²⁵ as exchangeable as the woman herself.

Yet there is a catch. A woman cannot be wholly commodified if she is to have any lasting value within the homosocial economy; she must retain her status as potentially either symbolic or actual capital. Susan seems to recognize the necessity of this ambiguity. Resisting her necessary transition from symbolic to commodifiable capital, she resolves to kill herself for her lost honour. Sir Charles, at some level recognizing that her chastity is valuable symbolically as well as economically, applauds her proposal: “I know thou pleasest me a thousand times,” he tells her, “More in that resolution than thy grant” (xiv.86–87). Symbolic value ultimately prevails within this aristocratic homosocial economy: Susan’s chastity, though not as important as the estate’s, still functions as a symbol of family honour. In the end, Sir Francis proves his class loyalty. Clearly affected by Sir Charles’s emphasis on the sexual act as one that will “blur our house,” “murder her,” and “kill me” (xiv.128–30), Sir Francis freely offers to marry Susan:

Your metamorphised foe receives your gift
 In satisfaction of all former wrongs.
 This jewel I will wear here in my heart,
 And where before I thought her for her wants
 Too base to be my bride, to end all strife
 I seal you my dear brother, her my wife. (xiv.141–46)

Susan and Sir Charles “seal” the proposed contract, and all is well.²⁶ Sir Francis finally abides by the rules of fair exchange that govern an economy where, it seems, it is inappropriate to divest another man of all his capital, both actual and symbolic. All three acknowledge that Susan, a “jewel,” is at once a valuable and exchangeable commodity and an important symbolic asset within the homosocial economy. Resolution is possible because both male parties respect the terms of exchange within that economy and come to a clearly defined and mutually ratified agreement.

II

In contrast, the Frankford plot depicts a scenario that results not in resolution, but in death. Anne’s tragedy, I propose, ensues because it is more difficult to maintain a woman’s ambiguous status, as both commodity and symbol, after marriage. Because of this problem, the terms that govern the homosocial economy in the Frankford plot are not easily definable. Anne’s chastity is, like Susan’s, an important asset within the homosocial economy, but, unlike Susan’s, it seems valuable only in terms of symbolic exchange. Anne is described and defined in proprietary terms not much different from those

used to describe Susan, but, as a married woman, she is not actually exchangeable as a commodity. She does, however, carry a great deal of symbolic value. This ambiguity leads to confusion over what, exactly, is exchangeable within the homosocial community between a married man and other members of that community.

As it does in relation to the Mountford plot, the play's opening scene plays an important role in defining the alternative and less stable homosocial economy that operates within the Frankford plot, an economy that centers on the circulation of symbolic capital.²⁷ The play does, however, begin by affirming Anne as material property. Sir Francis, Anne's brother, affirms her worth and her necessary subordination. His sister is "[a] perfect wife already, meek and patient" (i.37), and she must continue to prove "Pliant and duteous" (i.41). Sir Charles, on the other hand, describes Anne's virtues and the couple's "equality / In this fair combination" (i.66). This vaunted equality is not, however, uncompromised. Anne, though apparently equal, is also described only in relation to her husband:

She doth become you like a well-made suit
In which the tailor hath used all his art,
Not like a thick coat of unseasoned frieze,
Forced on your back in summer. She's no chain
To tie your neck, and curb you to the yoke,
But she's a chain of gold to adorn your neck. (i.59–64)

Sir Charles's speech describes Anne's wifely role in terms of commodities that are technically exchangeable yet whose primary function is to provide an outward display of wealth. Because a well-made suit and a chain of gold are visible indicators of wealth, they also, like Anne, function as symbolic capital, the kind of capital Frankford values most. As Hillman says, even "more important than the model of marriage" Sir Charles's speech describes "is this soon-to-be truly noble aristocrat's attribution of positive value to Frankford's household."²⁸ Anne's likeness to an attractive suit and a golden chain affirms Anne's symbolic value as an abstractly adorning asset and not a physical encumbrance, like a too-heavy chain or coat.

For the most part, the scene offers a view of the couple's relationship as it is seen by others. Anne speaks only one brief passage, and Frankford barely speaks at all. The rightness of their marriage thus seems not to depend so much on Anne's or Frankford's view of it, but on its validation by the homosocial community. The worth of this union is established by other men rather than by the couple involved. Sir Francis's and Sir Charles's speeches emphasize the importance of the perceptions of others, and Sir Charles's words show how such perceptions affirm Anne's symbolic value. It is true,

as Bonnie L. Alexander argues, that “Frankford seems to see Anne more as a possession than as a companion,”²⁹ but she is actual property whose value is primarily symbolic. Though Frankford’s material wealth may enable his marriage to Anne, it is her symbolic worth that ensures Frankford’s status within the homosocial economy. Because it both generates and circulates symbolic capital, this ritualistic affirmation of Anne’s value plays an integral role in the main plot’s homosocial economy.

Ritualistic as it is, the affirmation is not without tension. The value of Anne and Frankford’s union is established through the men’s praise, but, at the same time, such praise threatens the exclusiveness of that union. Even though, as Cranwell reminds him, “He speaks no more than you approve” (i.27), Frankford finds Sir Charles’s praise excessive and potentially threatening: “But that I know your virtues and chaste thoughts,” he tells him, “I should be jealous of your praise” (i.26). Anne, too, seems embarrassed by Sir Charles’s adulation, and insists that she wishes to be pleasing only to her husband: “His sweet content is like a flattering glass, / To make my face seem fairer to mine eye” (i.33–34). Anne’s and Frankford’s words suggest two things. First, although the rightness of their marriage and Anne’s worthiness need to be validated by other men, their admiration has necessary limits: as symbolic property, she must be admired but not to an extent that threatens her status as Frankford’s exclusive property. Second, although Anne too believes her worth exists only when validated by a man, for her it is legitimately validated by only one man. Her beauty and her worth exist only as they reflect her husband’s contentment, and only as they are perceived by him: “the least wrinkle from his stormy brow,” she tells her brother, “Will blast the roses in my cheeks that grow” (i.35–36). Anne resists adopting her symbolic role, imploring the company of men to “find a fitter theme / Than my imperfect beauty to speak on” (i.29–30), but her words are ineffectual. Though Anne recognizes and accepts her status as actual property, she also seems to recognize a potential danger in her symbolic role. The play thus immediately draws our attention to the problems that can arise when a woman’s function within the homosocial economy changes from actual capital to abstract, symbolic capital.

From the very beginning of the play, then, the Frankford plot aptly illustrates Sedgwick’s observation that women within a homosocial network “are in important senses property,” but they are also “property of a labile and dangerous sort.”³⁰ I would refine Sedgwick’s observation by suggesting that women as commodifiable property are dangerous not only because they can, as in Susan’s case, resist their own commodification, but because they are also expected to play a symbolic role within the homosocial system of commodity exchange. The nature of the main plot’s homosocial economy,

an economy that sees women function as symbolic (and thus non-commodifiable) capital, renders Anne a labile piece of property. Even as his metaphorical valuation generates the kind of symbolic capital needed to maintain a position of status within the homosocial economy, Sir Charles's praise is threatening because it attaches an actual value to Frankford's wife — Anne is “a chain of gold.” Frankford's rather sharp response suggests that Sir Charles, by reducing symbolism to money, oversteps the bounds of propriety: Anne's symbolic value is not quantifiable, and he errs by conflating the abstract and the concrete. At the same time, Sir Charles's metaphorical praise suggests that it is very difficult to distinguish between intangible asset and exchangeable commodity. Thus there always remains the danger of male validation becoming actual rather than symbolic, and this is precisely what occurs later in the play. The threat Frankford recognizes in the opening scene ultimately proves fatal to Anne, who is destroyed by her affair with Wendoll.

Complicating Anne's difficulty in maintaining her abstract and non-quantifiable symbolic value is the ambiguous nature of male friendship in the main plot. In the Mountford plot, male friendships are very clearly made through, and broken over, the contractual exchange of capital. The central male friendship of the main plot is not, however, based on such clearly defined terms, since the nature of symbolic capital means that there is always some uncertainty about what exactly is being exchanged. Anne's demise, I will suggest, is the result not only of her ambiguous status as both symbolic and actual capital but also of the problematic nature of Frankford's association with Wendoll. Jonathan Dollimore notes that “[f]requently in this period the representation of the man-man-woman triangle suggests that the desire which bonds men over women is as erotically invested for the men in relation to each other as for each of them in relation to the women.”³¹ I would not, however, jump to the conclusion that Frankford and Wendoll's relationship is one of even latent homosexuality. Certainly, Heywood does not give us even the kind of evidence that Marlowe, for instance, does in his depiction of Edward and Gaveston's relationship in *Edward II*, and, as Alan Bray has warned us, we must not be too quick to interpret intimacy between early modern men as evincing homosexual tendencies (or as evidence of sodomy, to use the slippery term Bray traces in his analysis).³² Here, I follow Dollimore and Sedgwick in using the latter's term “homosocial desire” to mean desire effected by an external cause, what Dollimore describes as “an eroticism created by rather than repressed by the social bond.”³³

That Frankford and Wendoll's relationship is significantly different from other male friendships in the play is apparent from the moment of Wendoll's return to the Frankford home the day after the wedding, where he

comes in a “smoking heat” (iv.25) to bring news of the hawking match murders. For some undisclosed reason, Frankford invites Wendoll to be “my companion” at “my own charge” (iv.72), and he seems to expect nothing material in exchange. But this friendship does, as Baines points out, manifest Frankford’s “generosity and trust,”³⁴ personal virtues that carry a great deal of symbolic and homosocial value. Frankford’s hospitality seems to know no bounds: “Please you to use my table and my purse,” he tells his friend, “They are yours” (iv.65–66). So far as Wendoll is given to understand, there are no limits placed on what he is free to enjoy among Frankford’s household and its goods. Wendoll and Frankford’s relationship thus stands out in two important ways. First, Frankford may be motivated by the desire to generate symbolic capital, but his friendship with Wendoll is based on the giving and acceptance rather than the exchange of actual capital. Second, the economic basis of that friendship does not include clearly defined limits: Frankford’s invitation seems to extend to everything he owns, including Anne.³⁵

Frankford, in fact, suggests the same to Anne when he tells her to “[u]se him with all thy loving’st courtesy” (iv.79–80). Being a pliant and obedient wife, Anne reaffirms Frankford’s seemingly unlimited invitation. Later, speaking on behalf of her absent husband, she tells Wendoll to “make bold in his absence” (vi.75) and use the house and its commodities as his own.³⁶ Despite the open invitation to “be a present Frankford” (vi.78), the limits of that invitation are implicitly understood, an understanding Anne conveys when she responds to Wendoll’s amorous advances with surprise that he “should hatch such a disloyal thought” (vi.110). The moral issue in this scene, as Canuteson suggests, is not the sanctity of Anne and Frankford’s marriage but Wendoll and Frankford’s relationship and “the betrayal of a friend.”³⁷ Homosocial relationships dominate even the seduction scene. Even so, Wendoll’s moral reservations are inseparable from his recognition that Anne is no longer an exchangeable commodity within the homosocial economy: to declare his desire for Anne, he knows, would also be to “[i]njure myself, wrong her, deceive his trust” (vi.101–2).³⁸ But, as Anne seemed to understand in the opening scene, her dual status as both symbolic capital and actual property can (and does) lead to confusion.

As a form of symbolic capital, Anne’s worth and her value exist only as they are recognizable to men who are not her husband, who nevertheless claims her as his exclusive property. Problems arise when symbolic admiration of her value threatens to usurp the husband’s proprietary rights. In Wendoll’s case, admiration of the sort expressed by Sir Charles — the kind of chaste admiration that is necessary to the circulation of symbolic capital but is necessarily limited — exceeds conventional boundaries. Yet the sexual act that results, which violates the terms of exclusive proprietorship, can also

be seen as the transgression of boundaries that were, in Wendoll's case, unclearly defined in the first place.³⁹ Because of the resulting confusion, validation by admiration becomes validation by consummation. Just as Anne is unable to redirect the course of conversation in the opening scene, so she seems equally powerless to change the course of her fall. Here, I agree with McQuade, who writes that "Heywood provides a compelling critique of female subjection within marriage on the grounds that it prevents both men and women from acting as responsible moral agents."⁴⁰ Anne's expected subjection to her husband (or his surrogate), together with her status as an ambiguous kind of capital, equally limits her capacity to act as an autonomous agent.

The play's critics have often complained about its lack of character development, especially in relation to Anne. Much ink has, in fact, been spilled in attempts to resolve this problem and to identify Anne's motivation: "The process of falling from love to adultery," as Kathleen E. McLuskie says, is "puzzlingly absent" from the play.⁴¹ But Anne's behaviour is not so much psychologically motivated as it is arbitrarily determined by a system in which her primary function is that of a circulating commodity.⁴² Anne does seem more of a cypher than anyone else in the play, but she seems one-dimensional because she is supposed to seem one-dimensional. Anne is not meant to be read as representing one woman's personal struggle within a system that uses and abuses her, nor is she meant to be read as an examination of the nature of womankind. Alan Sinfield says that "[a] character is not a character when she or he is needed to shore up a patriarchal representation,"⁴³ and his comment applies as much to Anne as it does to Desdemona or Lady Macbeth. That said, I would maintain that Anne is not meant to shore up a patriarchal representation (as her adultery and death have often been read as doing) as much as to critique a system that enables such transgressions to occur without apparent cause.

That Anne is meant to be read as the unfortunate victim of forces external to herself is certainly apparent in her recognition that her fate, though "decreed here," is "writ in heaven" (xvi.66). Her choice of the word "heaven" is telling as well, since it further suggests that patriarchal authority has exceeded its proper bounds: it is not heaven, but Frankford, who determines her fate. Such a reading is also supported by the play's proverbial title, which sees Anne construed, not as the active agent who chooses slowly to kill herself, but as a passive woman who is killed with kindness.⁴⁴ Because it is both arbitrary and inexplicable, Anne's unfortunate fall implies a critique of the system that demands woman's arbitrary subjection but is often ambiguous about the terms of that subjection, unwilling or unable to explain the difference between actual and symbolic value. In a work that makes it

extremely difficult to determine character motivation, it seems plausible that both Anne and Wendoll enact the kind of confusion that inevitably arises over the precise differences between symbolic, non-commodifiable forms of capital and commodities of the sort that have been made available to Wendoll without limitation.

This unconscious confusion, I am suggesting, is made manifest in what appears to be unexplained and unmotivated sexual desire. That this confusion is related to an equally confusing homosociality is certainly suggested by the context of Anne's acquiescence to Wendoll, won in the midst of their mutual avowals of love for Frankford.⁴⁵ Anne simply gives in: the nature of the men's homosocial bond, it seems, makes it impossible for her to distinguish between her husband's role and his friend's. Certainly, Frankford's virtual identification with Wendoll is apparent in his peculiar invitation to share all his goods — the kind of invitation one might extend to a future wife — and also in Wendoll's soliloquy on Frankford, where he claims to be “in the height of all his thoughts” and “to his body / As necessary as his digestion” (vi.38–42).⁴⁶ It warrants mention here that cuckoldry, it has been suggested, can function as the realization of homosocial desire through heterosexual union.⁴⁷ “To cuckold,” Sedgwick points out, “is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man,” one that “emphasizes heterosexual love chiefly as a strategy of homosocial desire.”⁴⁸ Though her elaborated definition of cuckoldry's homosocial function seems right on the mark in Anne and Wendoll's case, Sedgwick does not here distinguish between cuckoldry and symbolic desire. Such a distinction is, however, crucially important in *A Woman Killed*. In the homosocial economy depicted in the Frankford plot, desire for another man is ideally enacted on a wife only symbolically, while the act of cuckoldry destroys both homosocial and heterosexual relationships.

Wendoll and Anne's affair exceeds understood limits in that their union creates an actual rather than symbolic erotic triangle. Though such triangular relationships can establish and maintain a woman's value within marriage, once symbolic desire becomes actually fulfilled, a married woman ceases to have any value within the homosocial economy. This distinction becomes especially clear when the erotic triangle of the Frankford plot is compared with that of the Mountford plot. As Sedgwick suggests, the “erotic triangle” has proven to be a useful register for “delineating relationships of power and meaning” within homosocial culture.⁴⁹ While Anne, Frankford, and Wendoll literally form such a triangle in the main plot, the subplot offers a similar but crucially different triangular relationship in Susan, Sir Charles, and Sir Francis. The triangles are similar in that the female component of the triangle acquires meaning only in relation to the other two: in both Susan's and

Anne's cases, their value to their male proprietors can be ascertained only with the endorsement of a third male party. There is, however, a critical difference in what constitutes the value of each woman. Prior to marriage, Susan seems more valuable as commodity than as symbol, whereas in marriage, a wife like Anne is much more valuable as symbol than as commodity: in fact, her illicit commodification wholly negates her symbolic value.

The play's two erotic triangles thus diverge dramatically. In the Mountford plot, equilibrium can be restored within the homosocial economy because the triangular exchange is conducted on a clear understanding of the relationship between symbol and property. In the Frankford plot, however, the erotic triangle undermines the homosocial economy for two reasons. First, while Sir Charles acts as contractual mediator between Susan and Sir Francis, the liaison between Wendoll and Anne is undertaken with Frankford's implied disapproval. Secondly, and more importantly, there is a failure to understand the distinction between abstract symbol and physical property. To admire a man's wifely property is to affirm a husband's status within homosocial culture, but sexual possession of that property robs her husband of her symbolic value by actually commodifying her.

Thus, these structurally similar situations have very different results: one ends in Anne's death, while the other ultimately reinforces and reestablishes the homosocial community, and therefore allows a "happy" ending for Susan, Sir Charles, and Sir Francis. The happy ending of the subplot does not necessarily offer a moral exemplum. Susan appears to be rewarded while Anne is most severely punished, but Susan's sudden acceptance of her own commodification compromises her moral integrity.⁵⁰ As Orlin notes, these two women may be superficially different, but they are functionally conflated.⁵¹ These women may be morally compromised, but they are morally compromised because they function primarily as objects of trade within an economy they are powerless to resist. Anne is, as she herself points out, "enchanted" (vi.159) by Wendoll's professed admiration, an admiration not much different from Sir Charles's glowing praise in the wedding scene. Anne is, as Michael Wentworth suggests, "a reluctant sinner, and her paranoia and emphasis upon the deterministic and irrevocable momentum of sin underscore the helplessness of her situation."⁵² Both plots of the play depict a world guided by a homosocial economy that, whether its terms of exchange are primarily symbolic or actual, makes it very difficult for both Susan and Anne to maintain their symbolic value, and both seem to have little choice but to consent to their own commodification, regardless of the implications.

Heywood's treatment suggests that there is something inherently immoral in the nature of the homosocial economies depicted in both plots. Though

Susan's story does work out for what seems to be the best, she did, like Anne, once believe that her only "moral" option was suicide. In both cases, these women think that the only way they can regain their lost symbolic value is by committing a cardinal sin, and, as Panek observes, "one of the less pleasant side effects of suicide is eternal damnation."⁵³ Without getting too far into the matter of Heywood's religious beliefs, it does seem difficult to believe that this Christian moralist would uphold any version of homosociality that leaves women with a lack of real moral choice.⁵⁴ But Heywood does offer what is, I think, a less morally compromised alternative. In addition to the communities represented in the main and subplots, whose bonds are made and broken through the homosocial circulation of capital, Heywood depicts through the servants a community united by something quite different.

III

Like the communities of the main and subplots, this alternative — what I will call "the servants' plot" — is first presented very early in the play. Significantly, this plot is introduced between the opening wedding celebration, a scene that highlights the function of symbolic capital in the homosocial economy, and the hawking match, which delineates a homosocial economy based on the exchange of actual capital. This two-fold juxtaposition accentuates the distinguishing characteristics of the servants' community. Unlike the wedding guests we meet in the opening scene, the servants very much enjoy pastimes that are not gender-exclusive and are not defined by the potential for economic gain. We meet the servants in the midst of a good-natured quarrel over which dance they will dance. Though their debate is clearly a competitive activity, it is one in which neither actual nor symbolic capital seems at stake. After some debate and numerous suggestions, Nick's wish for "The Cushion Dance" is granted. But it is granted only by consensus. "Every man agree to have it as Nick says," Jenkin proposes, and all respond with endorsement: "Content" (ii.41–42). Though these men are arguably engaged in contract-making, this is a very different type of contract from those found in the Mountford plot. Unlike the numerous contracts made in the subplot — all of which are self-serving — this one is motivated by a desire for communal accord, and it does not involve the exchange of capital. Moreover, the terms of the agreement are very clearly expressed. The servants' plot offers a clearly understood contractual bond, one that neither allows for the confusion found in the main plot nor requires the exchange of capital that makes and breaks male friendships in the subplot.

Frankford's personal servant, Nick, plays a central role in defining the servants' community. In bridging the servants' plot and the main plot, he

draws our attention to their important differences. Nick also offers a version of male friendship different from other friendships seen in the play. Nick is a servant, and he is, of course, paid a wage of some kind. But this aspect of his and Frankford's relationship is not featured or even mentioned during the course of the play. Heywood does not stress this particular exchange of capital for services rendered as he does in other male relationships in the play. Ultimately, Nick's relationship with Frankford is based not on the circulation of capital, but on loyalty and compassion. Though Nick is rather loud, abrasive, and self-righteous, and, as Bowers suggests, he "alienates us through images of shockingly violent retribution,"⁵⁵ this does not necessarily mean he does not offer an ideal of male friendship.

Loyal servant that he is, Nick is immediately disturbed by Wendoll's arrival at the Frankford home:

I do not like this fellow by no means:
I never see him but my heart still earns.
Zounds, I could fight with him, yet know not why.
The devil and he are all one in my eye. (iv.85–88)

Nick loves his master, but — unlike Anne — he is determined not to serve Wendoll, whatever Frankford may desire. As we know, Nick's misgivings prove to be valid. He overhears Anne's seduction by Wendoll, and, although he loves both his master and his mistress, his ultimate loyalty lies with Frankford. "My master," he vows, "shall not pocket up this wrong" (vi.169). In resolving to tell Frankford about the affair, Nick demonstrates that he is motivated by nothing other than the wish to save his master from further violation of his house and his honour.

Frankford, for whom the circulation of capital is always operative, cannot appreciate Nick's motives: instead of listening to what he has to say, he slips him a coin. Yet Nick's insistence on revealing the illicit affair indicates that he is not motivated by self-interest. Rather, he acts out of steadfast loyalty, even in the face of Frankford's threat to turn him "[o]ut of my doors" (viii.49); as Nick clearly tells his master, there is no economic or retributive motive behind his action:

I can gain nothing. They are two
That never wronged me. I knew before
'Twas but a thankless office, and perhaps
As much as my service or my life is worth.
All this I know, but this and more,
More by a thousand dangers could not hire me
To smother such a heinous wrong from you.
I saw, and I have said. (vii.68–75)

Nick is, as Frankford suggests, the only trustworthy mortal left, “[w]hen friends and bosom wives prove so unjust” (viii.84).

Even so, Nick’s loyalty to Frankford does not quell his compassion for Anne. Unlike other male relationships depicted in the play, this one does not depend upon the exclusion or the absolute objectification of women. Delivering Anne’s forgotten lute to her as she travels to her place of banishment, Nick is moved to tears by her resolution that “[l]ast night you saw me eat and drink my last” (xvi.64). Nick resolves to return home with her “commendations” (xvi.84), and although the repentant Anne forbids him to do so, it is significant that he is nevertheless willing to act as a mediator on her behalf. Nick, unlike his master, readily forgives Anne, even though he fully acknowledges the extent of her crime and dutifully reports her offense to her husband.

Frankford, on the other hand, is unmoved until Anne is at the verge of death, even though he, as her husband, is supposed to love her above any other. Frankford’s remarkable self-importance and self-righteousness come to the forefront in the final scene, where he draws a notable and rather ironic parallel between himself and Christ — ironic because Christ’s defence of the woman taken in adultery suggests that he would have forgiven the truly repentant Anne long before it became too late to save her life. Too late to do any actual good, Frankford tells his dying wife,

As freely from the low depth of my soul
As my Redeemer hath forgiven his death,
I pardon thee. I will shed tears for thee,
Pray with thee, and in mere pity
Of thy weak state I’ll wish to die with thee. (xvii.93–97)

To this the assembled company replies, “So do we all” (xvii.98).

Though critics have often praised Frankford’s restraint and his virtue, I do not think we are meant to read him as “a middle-class hero.”⁵⁶ Anne may very well be a woman killed with kindness, but this kindness is bereft of moral value. The real value of Anne’s death, Hillman notes, lies in Sir Francis’s approval of Frankford’s “conspicuous exercise of mercy” and in the latter’s resulting admission to “the aristocratic family.”⁵⁷ In other words, this act of “kindness” is valuable to Frankford only to the extent that it can be abstracted as symbolic capital. Frankford’s response to Anne’s adultery exemplifies what Hillman calls “*Nouvelle noblesse oblige*” and serves as a means of regaining the symbolic capital he lost with her fall, while it is no less true here than earlier that “both class ambitions and smugness flaw Frankford’s moral standing.”⁵⁸ Frankford’s smugness is quite apparent in his misguided belief that killing, even with kindness, is a virtue and in his suspect death wish.

Nick, however, seems to recognize that Frankford's self-aggrandizing hyperbole is merely the converse of utter commodification, in that it treats Anne as a mere symbol. Nick resists the impulse to measure woman's value solely in terms of either symbol or property. On the contrary, Frankford's servant rejects the assembled company's professed death wish, which exploits Anne's impending death as a means of generating symbolic capital. In a significant aside, Nick declares his refusal to indulge in insincere gestures: "So will not I!" he exclaims, "I'll sigh and sob, but, by my faith, not die" (xvii.99–100). Unlike Sir Charles, Sir Francis, and Frankford, Nick seems to understand that repentance and forgiveness demand neither the actual death of those who transgress nor the symbolic death of those who forgive.

The homosocial communities depicted in the Mountford and Frankford plots are therefore morally compromised versions of an ideal, or something closer to an ideal, that is suggested in the figure of Nick.⁵⁹ In the mainplot and subplot, women are obliged to play variously the roles of symbol and of property: they are treated not as people but as currency. Yet, because these roles intersect in different ways before and after marriage, there is always the possibility of their becoming dangerously confused, as occurs in the Frankford plot. In the ideal alternative represented by Nick, community is defined first and foremost by moral considerations: loyalty, friendship, and compassion. These virtues may carry symbolic value, but in the community of the servants' plot they are not circulated, as they are in the Frankford plot, as abstract capital that serves social ambition; nor are they converted into actual capital, as Susan's chastity is in the Mountford plot. In the world of the servants, neither women's nor anyone else's virtue is commodified, and thus women are not treated as objects of exchange or as symbols. The play presents three distinct communities, but in only one of them does true kindness take precedence over capital.⁶⁰

Dalhousie University

Notes

1. Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Honor and Perception in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *MLQ* 20 (1959): 321.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 332.
3. In an earlier essay, "The Artistry of Thomas Heywood's Double Plots" (*Philological Quarterly* 25.2 [1946]: 97–119), Freda L. Townsend had disputed the critical relegation of "double plots" to "the Limbo of the merely eye-catching and inartistic" (p. 98) and the critical tendency to read Heywood's use of such plots as attesting to his lack of skill. Many critics, Spacks included, have followed Townsend's lead. Other discussions that identify some important connections between the two plots are by Herbert R. Courson, "The Subplot

- of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *English Language Notes* 2 (1965): 180–85; John Canuteson, "The Theme of Forgiveness in the Plot and Subplot of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Renaissance Drama* 2 (1969): 123–41; Margaret B. Bryan, "Food Symbolism in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Renaissance Papers* 1974, 9–17; Diana E. Henderson, "Many Mansions: Reconstructing *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *SEL* 26 (1986): 277–94; and Barbara J. Baines, in her book, *Thomas Heywood* (Twayne's English Authors Series 388 [Boston: Twayne, 1984]), where she describes the play's "impressive thematic and structural unity" (p. 80). Defences of the play's treatment of women have appeared frequently in more recent years. Most notably, Nancy A. Gutierrez ("The Irresolution of Melodrama: The Meaning of Adultery in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Exemplaria* 1 [1989]: 265–91; "Exorcism by Fasting in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*: A Paradigm of Puritan Resistance?" *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 33 [1994]: 43–62), Jennifer Panek ("Punishing Adultery in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *SEL* 34 [1994]: 357–78), Cynthia Lewis ("Heywood's *Gunaikeion* and Woman-Kind in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *English Language Notes* 32 [1994]: 24–37), and Paula McQuade ("A Labyrinth of Sin': Marriage and Moral Capacity in Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Modern Philology* 98 [2000]: 231–50) all argue that we are meant to sympathize with the play's women. As Lewis puts it, when *A Woman Killed* is read in relation to Heywood's *Gunaikeion*, it is clear that "Heywood locates the essence of charity in his two leading female characters, whom he invests with ultimate moral understanding" (p. 24).
4. Readings that discuss the play in terms of class include those found in Richard Levin's *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), Richard Hillman's *Intertextuality and Romance in Renaissance Drama: The Staging of Nostalgia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, 1992), Viviana Comensoli's "*Household Business*": *Domestic Plays of Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), and Manuela S. Rossini's essay, "The new Domestic Ethic in English Renaissance Drama: Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603)," in *A Woman's Place: Women, Domesticity, and Private Life*, ed. Annabelle Despard (Kristiansand, Norway: Agder College, 1998), pp. 106–17.
 5. Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), most clearly articulates the similar roles of characters who have most often been read in terms of "Susan's chastity and Anne's wantonness." Rather than affirming their opposition, Orlin identifies "a conceptual pattern that contrasts the two women only superficially (characterologically) and that conflates them functionally (ethically) by submerging any prospect of their agency" (p. 175).
 6. Rebecca Ann Bach, "The homosocial imaginary of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Textual Practice* 12 (1998): 503–24. Countering the many critics who read the play as a "domestic tragedy," Bach argues that "domestic" is an inappropriate term to apply to Heywood's tragedy, since the term itself suggests that the play centers on what we now conceive of as domesticity, that is, a societal norm realized in the union of a heterosexual couple such as the paradigmatic Ward and June Cleaver of the 1960s television series *Leave it to Beaver*. Though her approach differs significantly from mine, I wholly agree with Bach that this play is about something more encompassing than our understanding of "domestic" suggests. For other recent readings of the play as domestic tragedy, see Rick Bowers, "*A Woman Killed with Kindness*: Plausibility on a Smaller Scale," *SEL* 24 (1984): 293–306; Laura G. Bromley, "Domestic Conduct in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *SEL* 26 (1986): 259–76; Panek; Comensoli; and Baines, who notes that "the common conclusion is that Heywood's sensibility and talent are uniquely suited to domestic tragedy" (p. 103). In "Business, Pleasure, and the Domestic Economy in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*"

- (*Exemplaria* 9 [1997]: 315–40), Ann Christensen reads the play in terms of the “domestic economy” and identifies the tension that occurs because of an overlap between “the spaces of home and work” (p. 316).
7. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 1.
 8. Bach argues, as I do, that communal bonds in Heywood’s play are homosocial in nature and that “rethinking heterosexuality in early modern England cannot be divorced from an understanding of economic systems” (p. 518). However, her analysis does not explore these economic systems as much as it focusses on demonstrating that heterosexuality, as we define it, is not a component of early modern thinking and that anachronistic notions of domesticity have erroneously shaped more recent criticism of the play.
 9. Luce Irigaray, “When the Goods Get Together” (1977), trans. Claudia Reeder, rpt. in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken, 1981), pp. 107–11.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
 11. Sedgwick, pp. 25–26. Sedgwick here is summarizing the workings of patriarchy as described by anthropologist Gayle Rubin in “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157–210. In her well-known study, Sedgwick begins with Shakespeare’s sonnets and shows how homosocial practices, including the circulation of women as symbolic capital, function in a variety of literary works.
 12. Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 15.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
 14. In her illuminating discussion of the play, Orlin acknowledges “the symbolization of the woman as the most valuable and potentially most fugitive of possessions” within both homosocial and heterosexual relationships (p. 141). We agree on this point and many others, but I do not share Orlin’s view of the play as corroborating the early modern belief that marriage was “far more profound a transition for men” than women (p. 143). Though it is true that, because Anne “has merely transferred the direction of her duty from a brother to a husband,” her “essential political status is undisturbed” (p. 142), it is also true that Anne’s duty remains the same only insofar as her value is symbolic and actual both before and after marriage. Orlin does not acknowledge the postnuptial shift in emphasis I am identifying: the play in many ways suggests that an unmarried woman is most valuable as actual capital, while a married woman’s value is primarily symbolic. Bromley also identifies a relation between the two plots that is based on codes of behaviour. “The subplot,” she argues, “is related to the main plot in a way other than what has occurred to earlier critics: both plots test a man’s honor, his loyalty to an explicit code of behavior” (p. 261). Bromley uses contemporary “gentleman books” to make her argument, and suggests that “Many of the seemingly discordant elements in the play make sense when Heywood is thought of as attempting to meet the needs of the growing segment of society which turned to conduct books as guides to proper behavior” (p. 263). Though Bromley’s argument is persuasive, it differs from my analysis. I am not suggesting that Heywood’s is an explicit critique of homosocial culture nor that his characters are aware of the implicit homosocial economy that motivates their actions.
 15. The 1542 *Act for the Explanation of the Statute of Wills* (34 Hen. VIII, c. 5) declared as statute the principle that married women during their “coverture” (that is, during marriage)

- had no legal testamentary rights in relation to real estate: a married woman's property, whether acquired before or after marriage, became her husband's absolutely.
16. Christensen points out that "economy" in the early modern period referred to the "domestic economy," that is, "households operated as and were conceptualized as economic units; the spaces of home and work, and the persons associated with family and business overlapped in the period." She goes on to note that the "tensions in the play are rooted in this overlap" (p. 316) and attributes to them Anne's surrender of chastity, her chief "domestic good" (p. 321), while Frankford is away on non-domestic business. Christensen's aim is to show how Heywood's play, like other domestic plays, explores the "workings of nascent capitalism" (p. 323). I wholly agree that *A Woman Killed* is very much centred on economies and economic change, though I focus on the way in which women and other forms of capital circulate between men.
 17. Levin, p. 93.
 18. Rossini, p. 106.
 19. Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, ed. Brian W. M. Scobie (London: A & C Black, 1985), i.17. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be documented within the text.
 20. In his note to the text, Brian Scobie points out that "tendered down" means that the money is "paid according to legal form," and suggests that "something more contractual than the *OED*'s simple 'laid down in payment' seems implied here" (n. to v.57).
 21. Sir Charles's refusal is not entirely selfish. As Henderson points out, "The threat is to both Mountfords here, to their very existence, and Charles's response is not one of greed or vanity alone. Without the house, both its place and its name, neither Charles nor Susan have a social identity" (p. 285). Even so, the property is ultimately Sir Charles's to keep or relinquish as he sees fit.
 22. Sir Charles's refusal to enter into a new contract is perhaps also motivated by the fact that the terms were not made clear in the initial agreement, nor was he informed of Shafton's recent alteration of its terms. "An execution, sir," Sir Charles asks him, "and never tell me / You put my bond in suit? You deal extremely" (vii.31–32). Because these altered terms of exchange were never discussed openly with the aim of arriving at some sort of mutual agreement, Shafton had broken the contractual rules of this homosocial economy.
 23. Orlin, p. 157.
 24. Lewis, p. 25.
 25. Rossini, p. 115.
 26. Yet, as Gutierrez points out, what seems to be a morally right decision on Sir Francis's part does not alter Susan's status as an object: "even with Acton's magnanimity in marrying her instead of corrupting her, the subplot . . . presents the body of a woman as a battleground for male competition" ("Melodrama," pp. 280–81). Gutierrez's metaphor of war, however, may obscure the nature of Sir Charles's and Sir Francis's negotiations over Susan: these are the rituals of traders and barterers rather than warriors.
 27. This is not to say that the circulation of actual capital is not important in the Frankford plot. Lealore Lieblein, for one, quite rightly notes that John and Anne Frankford's marriage "is described in terms of material possessions which define their value" ("The Context of Murder in English Domestic Plays, 1590–1610," *SEL* 23 [1983]: 190). Lieblin also hints, however, at the importance of symbolic capital when she goes on to point out that "Frankford speaks of himself and his friend Wendoll as being 'possess'd of' (iv.5) their

- abilities and qualities as well as material goods" (*ibid.*). I believe that not only do these personal attributes represent the most important type of capital within the homosocial economy of the main plot, but the married Anne's value is by and large determined by the extent to which her virtue reflects (and thus verifies) the abilities and qualities of her husband.
28. Hillman, p. 88.
 29. Bonnie L. Alexander, "Cracks in the Pedestal: A Reading of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Massachusetts Studies in English Literature* 7.1 (1978): 4.
 30. Sedgwick, p. 50.
 31. Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 304.
 32. See Alan Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England," in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 40–61.
 33. Dollimore, p. 304.
 34. Baines, p. 80.
 35. Bryan suggests, quite rightly I think, that Frankford "subconsciously invites his friend to cuckold him" (pp. 9–10).
 36. Christensen observes that Anne seems wholly uninterested in material wealth. It is not Anne but "Wendoll who is more often explicitly represented as the beneficiary of Frankford's largess" (p. 333). (I am unconvinced that the play offers sufficient evidence to conclude, as Comensoli does, that Anne is meant to be read as a "vain, temptable woman" [p. 79].) I would add, however, that Anne shows little or no interest in material goods because she is herself a commodity within the economy that provides and exchanges such goods. Wendoll, on the other hand, has little to offer in the way of actual exchange, yet he is willing and able to be a full participant in that economy. Wendoll's friendship with Frankford makes him a material beneficiary and seals him as a member of the homosocial community, while Frankford benefits from their friendship because it has symbolic value within the homosocial economy: it not only attests to his "largess" but also verifies his primary loyalty to other men.
 37. Canuteson, p. 13.
 38. As Frederick Kiefer notes, "Wendoll has good reason to be apprehensive. In a society with a keen sense of right and wrong, his behavior defies the moral norms. And if the community honors relationships that have a religious sanction, as in the play's opening scene, it abhors the betrayal of such relationships" ("Heywood as Moralist in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 3 [1986]: 85).
 39. Gutierrez makes a related point when she notes that "[b]oth Anne and Wendoll are moved to sin because fundamental family relationships have been upset: Wendoll has been acting like Frankford in all things but sexual access to Anne, and he now assumes this prerogative; Anne, denied her protective shield as Frankford's unapproachable wife, acquiesces to this 'surrogate' husband she has known since the day after her marriage" ("Melodrama," p. 277).
 40. McQuade, p. 233.
 41. Kathleen E. McLuskie, *Dekker and Heywood: Professional Dramatists* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, 1994), p. 157.
 42. McLuskie, writing about Dekker and Heywood's plays generally, notes that "[d]irectors and audiences recognise the emotional power of the situations they dramatise, but are also

- aware of the way that the characters are embroiled in problems that arise as much from their historical circumstances as from their particular psychology” (p. 180). McLuskie’s point is, I think, especially relevant to *A Woman Killed*, a play whose characters’ particular psychologies have long eluded readers, audiences, and directors. We are not meant to read this play as we do *Hamlet*: Heywood’s play is not about individuals and their inner conflicts but rather about changing “historical circumstances” and the kinds of interpersonal conflicts inevitable in such change.
43. Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 54.
 44. Thomas Moisan (“Framing with Kindness: The Transgressive Theatre of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*,” in *Essays on Transgressive Readings: Reading Over the Lines* [Lewiston NY: Mellen, 1997], pp. 171–84), argues that Anne is merely a cypher from the very beginning. Moisan is, I think, quite right about this, and his reading corroborates my interpretation of the married Anne as symbolic capital. Where my reading and Moisan’s diverge is on the matter of its critique of patriarchy. Moisan believes the play to be marked by “irresolution and resistance to closure” (p. 183). Though I do agree that the play is, as Moisan claims, a site of competing polyphonous voices, I do not see it as ideologically indeterminate; rather, I believe that Heywood makes his critique of the homosocial underpinnings of patriarchy the most audible of the play’s multiple voices.
 45. Bowers argues that Wendoll actually wins Anne over through his appeals to their mutual love for Frankford. As he suggests, Anne “is to understand his love as an ‘augmentation’ of their mutual affection for Frankford. It is an expansion of degree, not love of a different kind, and, put in this way, she feels compelled to accept him almost out of duty to her husband” (p. 299).
 46. Panek suggests that 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’” (p. 365), while McQuade argues that “Frankford invests this relationship with the intimacy and affection that Protestant theologians claimed should be devoted to one’s spouse” (p. 242). Both readings are, I think, accurate, though I also think that the problem is exacerbated by Anne’s status as the kind of ambiguous symbolic capital that can easily, through no fault of her own, be confused with the commodifiable kind.
 47. “To affirm his homosocial relationship with Wendoll,” McQuade points out, “Frankford instructs Anne to treat Wendoll as another self during his absence” (p. 243). McQuade argues, much as I do, that Frankford expects only the mimetic fulfilment of this homosocial desire, assuming that Anne will not actually act the part of the adulteress. Though we do make a very similar point, our terms differ: what she describes as mimetic fulfilment, I describe as the circulation of symbolic capital, and while McQuade reads the play in terms of Protestant morality and casuistical thought, I read Anne’s adultery and Frankford and Wendoll’s relationship in relation to the plot’s homosocial economy.
 48. Sedgewick, p. 49.
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
 50. Susan’s decision to marry Sir Francis “without a qualm,” Spacks observes, offers an “expedient resolution” to the Mountfords’ problems, but this is “hardly a resolution to leave us firmly convinced that Susan Mountford is the model of virtue and honor she has seemed to be” (p. 329). I would add that this resolution is unconvincing as a moral resolution because it means that Susan has become as cynical and as mercenary as the men she initially resists.

51. Orlin, p. 175.
52. Michael Wentworth, "Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* as Domestic Morality," in *Traditions and Innovations: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark DE: University of Delaware Press, 1990), p. 155.
53. Panek, p. 372.
54. Heywood is generally acknowledged to be a Christian dramatist. Brian Scobie, for example, suggests that the play is "essentially Christian," and that "[t]here is good evidence to confirm that Heywood himself regarded the drama as a didactic medium well suited to the propagation of virtue and the condemnation of vice" (Scobie, ed., p. xviii). See Panek and McQuade for detailed readings of the play within its Christian context.
55. Bowers, p. 301.
56. Bromley, p. 264.
57. Hillman, p. 85.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 86 and 90.
59. I agree with Levin's observation that Nick acts "on a simple and spontaneous natural impulse," while the characters of the Mountford plot, in addition to a need for money, are also driven by "an artificial code of private honor and vengeance" (p. 95). Unlike Levin, though, I do not believe that Nick acts without moral understanding; rather, he responds as any moral person naturally — and honestly — would. I thus disagree with Levin's conclusion that Frankford's "middle-class morality" is the ideal and that we must therefore "recognize the superiority of his standard" to (*ibid.*) those depicted in the subplot and the servant's plot. As I have argued above, this play critiques rather than "celebrates the code of Franklin [*sic*] and his class" (p. 96) and, concomitantly, critiques the values of the aristocratic class he tries to emulate.
60. I would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Izaak Walton Killam Trust. Thanks are also owed to Ronald Huebert for his valuable feedback and encouragement.