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Randall Martin
University of New Brunswick, rmartin@unb.ca

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RANDALL MARTIN

'Arden winketh at his wife's lewdness, & why!': A Patrilineal Crisis in Arden of Faversham

Thomas Arden's apparent credulity in the face of his wife's affair with her lover, prior to their murder of him in 1551, strikes an erratic chord in an otherwise finely tuned drama of psychological realism. His complacence evidently fascinated the anonymous playwright, who went much further than his source, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, in representing the historical Ardern as a radically divided character: remorselessly ambitious and spasmodically violent toward his rival Mosby and others, but irrationally, even ludicrously, submissive and naïve at other moments.[1] The playwright's sharpened portrayal of Arden's disjunctive identity can be understood as a continuation of efforts by prior historical accounts to interpret the relationship between his permissive acceptance of Alice's affair and his own death.[2] The first such attempt appeared in the official report by the town, the Wardmote Book of Faversham:

> to thintent to murder thesaid Ardern her housband[,] whiche Alyce thesaid Morsby did not onely Carnally kepe in her owne house here in this towne[,] Butt also fedd her w^{t} dilicate meates and sumptuous app[ar]ell[.] All whiche things thesaid Thomas Ardern did well knowe and wilfully did p[er]mytt and suffred the same[,] By reason whereof she p[ro]cured her said housbands death.[3]

This account extends criminal culpability beyond the murder to hold Ardern partly responsible, since his wilful ignorance turned his home into a bawdy house and Mosby into a whoremaster. For the original townsfolk, as well as for later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers who re-present the murder, Ardern's self-willed cuckoldry was not merely a peculiar factor leading to a sensational private tragedy, but a public scandal with disturbing social and political implications.[4] As King's Controller of the Customs for the port of Faversham, and landowning head of a family with powerful connections to the court and privy council through his wife, Ardern had betrayed the accepted code of masculine honour by abdicating proper regulation of his household.

Tolerance of his wife's affair also destabilized public order, which the playwright underlines by representing civic interventions in response to Arden's actions.[5] Arden himself reports that rumours have been circulating among 'all the knights and gentlemen of Kent' (i. 343).[6] Their interest, in historical terms, is legal and fiduciary, not curious and detached. These public concerns may partly explain why Holinshed decided to include an account of this 'private' story in his *Chronicles*, even though it seems to fall outside the parameters of national history.[7] Holinshed attributes Ardern's consent to ambition and greed:

> yet bicause he would not offend [Alice], and so loose the benefit which he hoped to gaine at some of hir freends hands in bearing with hir lewdnesse, which he might haue lost if he should haue fallen out with hir: he was contented to winke at hir filthie disorder, and both permitted, and also inuited Mosbie verie often to lodge in his house.[8]

In this interpretation, Ardern's motive becomes appeasing Alice for the sake of the financial and social advantages she brings with her through her family. Her step-father was Sir Edward North, Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations under Henry VIII and responsible for distributing church property seized after the Dissolution of the monasteries. North had granted Sir Thomas Cheney a sizeable portion of the Faversham Abbey lands and a nearby house, which he later sold to Ardern, a transaction mentioned in the play's first scene. Holinshed's interpretation is partly contradicted, however, by an alternative manuscript account that constructs Ardern's motives differently:[9]

> [he] was yet so greatly gyven to seek his advauntage, and caryd so litle how he came by it that in hope of atteynynge some benefits of the lord northe by meanes of this mosby who could do muche w^{t} hym, he winked....[10]

Here Ardern wishes to retain Mosby's good favour in order to have access to patronage through Lord North, who was Mosby's patron, although the play, possibly for political reasons, changes North to the unhistorical Lord Clifford and says nothing about such patronage.

The playwright, while partially following Holinshed in moralizing the social dislocation caused by Arden's acquisitiveness, conspicuously ignores both these interpersonal explanations for his odd behaviour. As Frances E. Dolan observes, the play offers 'no alternative explanation as to why [Arden] tolerates an adultery he suspects or why he simply abandons his wife and home'.[11]

Instead it seems to caricature Arden as a victim of his own extreme emotions, agonizing over his wife's patent infidelity but always yielding to her implausible pleas of innocence, to the growing amazement and frustration of his friend Franklin. The playwright thus problematizes Arden's personal responsibility for failing to end the affair, and by doing so opens the possibility of understanding his actions in other ways: first, that Arden may have positive reasons for wanting his wife's adultery to continue and for befriending Mosby; and second, that his passivity and volatility are calculated responses which partially reassert his lost control over his wife and household. In this paper I wish to suggest that Arden's split personality is not a result of the playwright's mishandling or 'naked' (as the Epilogue puts it) representation of contradictory reports found in the chronicles. Rather they are his dramatic interpretation of the underlying motives of Thomas Ardern's responses to the affair – an affair that Arden tactically and surreptitiously enables in order to solve a more urgent and deeply personal problem: his lack of a male heir. Since Arden does not say anything directly about this (and perhaps could not), my argument is inferential, though it is based on real early modern values and historical conditions that defined the nature of property, status, and inheritance. It is also invited by the role's challenge to stage performers, who must convey some explanation for Arden's behaviour. While modern productions and critical studies have shown how Alice Arden skilfully exploits the roles of victimized wife and sexual rebel, Arden's identity has been regarded as divided and undynamic. His subjectivity is no less constrained and performative, however, as he responds creatively to his threatened loss of patriarchal agency. Arden's ambitions and behaviours are inflected by the cultural pressures of male dynastic inheritance as well as the masculine psychology of sexual jealousy.

II

Writing forty years after the historical murder of Ardern and seeking to clarify its original social context for his late-Elizabethan audience, the playwright directly links Arden's newly acquired wealth to the most materially far-reaching event of the century: the Dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII.[12] This act of theological expediency resulted in the state appropriating and selling off church property amounting to a quarter of the land in England. For the first time large tracts became negotiable commodities bought by a new social class – the gentry – whose loyalties and interests became bound to those of the emerging nation state.[13] The play's opening speech announces that Arden is

one of the new men who have profited from this revolution in private ownership, as Franklin presents him with deeds signed by the Lord Protector and Edward VI to 'All the lands of the Abbey of Faversham' (i. 5). Yet this good fortune has failed to make Arden happy, since his personal life is in turmoil owing to Alice and Mosby's affair. Even more 'monstrous' and 'intolerable' (i. 23) to him are his rival's low social origins. As Michael Neill has recently shown in a revealing close reading of the play, the subtle verbal gradations in Arden's confrontations with Mosby and others betray an aggressive insecurity about his class, and this in turn is related to continual jockeying over rank and power among all the play's characters.[14] Although Arden claims 'I am by birth a gentleman of blood' (i. 36), ownership of the land that would substantiate his position is rancorously disputed by Greene and Reede, and coveted by Mosby, who like Arden hopes to climb socially.

Arden's actual status is therefore unstable and contingent, lying provisionally between that of yeoman and gentleman. Yeomen were traditionally freeborn farmers to gentlemen or those who owned small estates, as the name of Arden's friend and social peer, Franklin, literally signifies. But with new opportunities for acquiring property opened up by the Dissolution, mobility between the two estates had become exceptionally fluid. William Harrison observed in his *Description of England* (1577, 1587), published as the introduction to Holinshed's *Chronicles,* that yeomen now 'commonly live wealthily, keep good houses, and travail to get riches'.[15] Outwardly, in other words, many displayed the same visible signs of consumption and prosperity as gentlemen, while the dynamic land market allowed politically connected yeomen to purchase lands rivalling or surpassing the holdings of established gentry. But as Harrison points out, more than material acquisition is needed to cross the dividing line into the ruling class. Wealthy yeomen must either send their sons 'to the schools, to the universities, and to the Inns of the Court', or 'otherwise [leave] them sufficient lands whereupon they may live without labor' on the income from their holdings.[16] Gentle status and paternal authority are only authentically established by transference of family wealth to an heir.

Holinshed's *Chronicles* alludes in passing to Ardern and Alice having two daughters, and at another point states that one of them played the virginals after her father was killed while the killers danced (presumably this was the eldest; one wonders if she knew what was going on, and if so what her thoughts were – but that's another story). The play, however, portrays Arden and Alice as childless, although Alice does mention the idea of children at one point:

> My saving husband hoards up bags of gold
> To make our children rich... (i. 220–1)

Alice's contempt for Arden's thrift indicates that these children are notional, and that she is ridiculing her husband's ambitions of eventually bequeathing future heirs a handsome fortune to prop up his credentials as a gentleman – pretensions she seems to mock further by immediately drawing attention to his present less-than-gentle employment:

> ... and now is he
> Gone to unload the goods [at the quay] (i. 221–2)

Alice's sarcasm reveals the corollary of Arden's material ambitions to be his urgent need for an heir, which in early modern practice means a son.[17]

Franklin signals Arden's underlying problem at the very beginning of the play by noting that the duke of Somerset has made the grant of abbey lands 'to thee and to thy heirs' (i. 3). The legal tone underlines the implication that this property will revert to the crown if the Ardens fail to have children. Later in this first scene when Greene complains to Alice about the new deed of lands, part of which he formerly owned, she confirms that 'the lands are in [Arden's] state, / And whatsoever leases were before / Are void for term of Master Arden's life' (i. 465–7). Alice hints that if Arden were to die, Greene would regain his title, since no heirs stand in the way of reversion. Greene takes the hint, vowing to be revenged, 'so as he shall wish the Abbey lands / Had rested still within their former state' (i. 481–2). And when Alice persuades him to hire a killer, she can promise him that 'the lands whereof my husband is possessed / Shall be intitled as they were before' (i. 524–5). These assurances would have no force if the Ardens already had a son or daughter.

Lena Cowen Orlin has extensively documented the historical Ardern's success in acquiring land, which at the time of his death generated an annual income of £45 (and was therefore probably worth about £900). Of this amount, income from the Faversham Abbey lands was £19, while that from a manor granted by the king was £12. This second property did eventually revert to the Crown because it was entailed to heirs male, and Ardern had no son. The rest of Ardern's estate was bequeathed to the Corporation of Faversham for charitable purposes and to his only daughter, with both parties subsequently disputing each other's legacy in the courts.[18] Arden demonstrated the threat of non-related males alienating land from a female inheritor when he seized possession of 'that plot of ground / Which he by force and violence held from

Reede' (Epilogue, 10–11), 'Which field he had (as some haue reported) most cruellie taken from a woman, that had beene a widow to one Cooke'.[19] This was the same plot where Ardern was later laid after he was murdered, as is Arden in the play.[20] Although Holinshed does not mention the circumstances under which Ardern managed to wrest the land from Reede, it is clear that the weak and insecure grounds of female inheritance gave him an opportunity to do so.

The cultural and legal ideal of male inheritance, and the lengths to which characters might be willing to go to secure it, is mentioned at several other points, and serves to clarify the nature of Arden's crisis. Black Will bluntly notes one easy way for a son to cut short the tedium of waiting for a legacy:

> How? Twenty angels? Give my fellow George Shakebag and me twenty angels; and, if thou'lt have thy own father slain that thou may'st inherit his land, we'll kill him. (ii. 87–90)

Earlier in the first scene, when Michael rages against his rival, a painter, for the hand of Susan, he brags, 'I'll make her more worth than twenty painters can; / For I will rid mine elder brother away, / And then the farm of Bolton is mine own' (i. 171–3). Michael's fantasy of fraternal usurpation reflects the 'imbrication of erotic desire ... with the appetite for property and status' that marks other relationships throughout the play, above all the main sexual triangle.[21] As a younger brother Michael also seems to be a casualty of primogeniture, 'denied the material security commensurate with the ownership of property',[22] and forced into a lower social position in Arden's household as a result of being disinherited. His revenge scheme represents another twisted scenario of patrilineal descent, a scheme that would be pointless besides being farfetched if his brother had a male heir.

III

The seriousness of Arden's dilemma, which raises expectations about the lengths he might be willing to go to resolve it, is realistically underlined by a topical analogy that has been overlooked in recent studies of the play's historical contexts. Frank Whigham has argued that *Arden of Faversham*'s dramatization of the material and social effects of the Dissolution of the monasteries make it a history play.[23] While this event is unquestionably significant, it is not the only one from the reign of Henry VIII that would have been relevant for late-Elizabethan spectators and readers. For Arden's lack of a male heir recalls

the most notorious dynastic controversy of the sixteenth century. Ten years after Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon in 1515, the queen was forty and had not been pregnant for at least seven years. Before then there had been five or more deliveries of non-surviving children, but only one surviving girl, Mary, born in 1516.[24] She was later betrothed to François Valois, raising the prospect of the English throne passing into French hands. The uncertainty of female and possibly foreign rule, and fears of a disputed succession and civil war in the event of a female successor – borne out previously by the Hundred Years War, still fresh in memory – created in Henry's mind a pressing need for a legitimate male heir.[25] This also coincided with his infatuation with Anne Boleyn. Which came first has long been a matter of debate, with considerable demonization of Anne as a *femme fatale*. But research by historian Retha M. Warnicke has refocused attention on the pragmatic urgency of Henry's 'great matter' in a way which illuminates Arden's crisis:

> [Both Catherine and Anne] became the involuntary victims of the king's drive and ambition for his own lineage.... The issue at stake was not which one of these noblewomen Henry loved more but which one of them, given the constraints of the human anatomy, would be more likely to present him with the desired male heir.[26]

In 1527 Henry's divorce proceedings began, and six years later they were completed. Catherine Belsey has situated Alice Arden's frustrated desire to be free of her husband within the context of sixteenth-century debates over the practice of divorce, an evolving political and theological controversy impelled in no small measure by Henry's excessive fondness for ridding himself of wives.[27] While divorce may be an implied concern for Alice, Arden's immediate goal is to find an heir. Henry's and Arden's shared vulnerability over patrilineal inheritance and legitimacy would have been obvious to class-conscious and dynastically minded Elizabethans, who in the late 1580s and early 90s continued to debate the question of their own monarch's successor and saw the issue staged in numerous plays about disputed or uncertain successions, most notably Shakespeare's. For both Henry and Arden, having a son became crucial to the transmission and validation of their authority. Their crisis is linked materially in so far as Ardern and Arden are heirs of Henry's legacy of confiscated church lands, and thus inheritor of his masculine obligation to pass those lands down to his own son.[28] Such parallels may further explain Holinshed's inclusion of Ardern's story in his chronicle of national events, which is above all a history of successive kings.

At the time of the murder, Thomas and Alice Ardern had been married for six or seven years without having any children. According to Kentish oral tradition, which the playwright could have known, now preserved in eighteenth-century chapbooks, Ardern was fifty-six when he settled at Faversham as an officer of the Crown, and fifty-nine when he married Alice Mirfyn, who was twenty-eight. When Ardern was murdered in 1551, he was sixty-six and Alice thirty-five.[29] Holinshed states that her affair with Mosby had continued openly for two years. These details suggest that time was running out for Ardern. The play does not mention his age, but Alice confirms at one point that Mosby has been her lover for some time.[30] The play also implies that Arden may no longer be capable of sustaining a sexual relationship. In the opening scene, Arden is suffering severely from melancholy, one well-known symptom of which was impotence.[31] From an audience's perspective, his implied dysfunction is parodied at large in the play's main action by the continually fizzling efforts of Black Will and Shakebag, who display melancholy tendencies of their own. Their inability to kill Arden mirrors Arden's inability to get an heir.[32] Alice seems also to hint at her husband's impotence, from her own perspective, as Arden's social ambitions displace his nuptial ones:

> ALICE: The time hath been – would God it were not past! –
> That honour's title nor a lord's command
> Could once have drawn you from these arms of mine. (x. 14–16)[33]

Set up by men as the guarantors of dynastic legitimacy, and with the power to validate male identity, wives were a continual potential source of anxiety, as Henry VIII brutally demonstrated when he executed both Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard on charges of witchcraft and adultery.[34] One obvious danger of Alice and Mosby's affair is that it will produce a child of illegitimate or dubious paternity:

> I pray thee, Mosby, let our springtime wither;
> Our harvest else will yield but loathsome weeds. (viii. 66–7)

But Arden himself never mentions this. Perhaps it is too ominous to be spoken of directly, or is already implicit in the torments of cuckoldry he reveals to Franklin. On the other hand his silence may be connected to the critical question with which this essay began: why Arden allows the affair between his wife and Mosby to continue under his own roof, against all reasonable judgment, to the point of befriending Mosby and shielding Alice.

Holinshed leaves undefined the 'benefit' Ardern desires 'to gaine at some of [Alice's] freends hands in bearing with hir lewdnesse'. Modern critics have assumed on the basis of this and other accounts that both Arden and Mosby compete to control access to Alice's body solely for material gain.[35] The playwright, however, does not emphasize avarice as a major motive, in which case the 'benefit' may not be only monetary but also biological: Alice's ability to produce a child that will continue Arden's lineage and secure his gentle status.[36] Since Arden is presumably too old for remarriage, Mosby's affair with Alice has become the only possible solution to his patrilineal crisis, by providing him with the male child his marriage may never produce, and which Arden himself may no longer be capable of producing. If this is his motive – as his otherwise bizarre refusal to bar Mosby from his house indicates – his concerns are two-fold. Arden must covertly permit and control Mosby's relationship with Alice, and he must affirm Alice's chastity in order to create the plausible public perception that a new child could be legitimate because his trust in his wife is unconditional. He therefore tactically disables his patriarchal authority by 'winking' at Mosby's usurpation of his domestic headship and conjugal rights.[37] When the play opens, Arden reveals that such a marital displacement has already begun; as he tells Franklin, 'on [Mosby's] finger did I spy the ring / Which at our marriage day the priest put on' (i. 17–18). Since Arden's absence from Faversham in London is apparently brief, the time away from Alice will not jeopardize his exclusive claim to any pregnancy.[38] Moreover, because Arden's bouts of depression and rage are enacted before his male friend and social peer Franklin – an invented character whose viewpoint and responses establish a patriarchal norm – they work to rehabilitate his masculine reputation. The price of relinquishing his spousal rights is the paroxysms of shame that intermingle with Arden's moments of calculated self-abasement. Alice's adultery is something Arden intensely loathes and yet needs. His public submissiveness can be seen as an improvised diversion for the high-risk gamble of surrogate paternity, as well as a way of attempting to master the furious jealousy that at times breaks out uncontrollably, yet at other times seems to be purposefully histrionic:

> What pity-moving words, what deep-fetched sighs,
> What grievous groans and overlading woes
> Accompanies this gentle gentleman!
> Now will he shake his care-oppressèd head,
> Then fix his sad eyes on the sullen earth,

> Ashamed to gaze upon the open world;
> Now will he cast his eyes up towards the heavens,
> Looking that ways for redress of wrong.
> Sometimes he seeketh to beguile his grief
> And tells a story with his careful tongue;
> Then comes his wife's dishonour in his thoughts
> And in the middle cutteth off his tale,
> Pouring fresh sorrow on his weary limbs. (iv. 40–52)

Franklin's reports indicate that Arden is no less calculating a performer than Alice. Whereas she enacts the role of abused wife to gain sympathetic accomplices, he stages the role of the wronged yet heroically forbearing husband who rises nobly above culturally approved and theatrically conventional revenge. And while Alice manages to keep the murder conspiracy a complete surprise to Arden until the very end, he successfully covers up his humiliating motive from everyone, except perhaps Franklin (of whom, more below), before whom he must keep up the pretence of lamenting Alice's betrayal. In the meantime Arden's personal agency is compromised and his patriarchal authority suspended while the 'great matter' of his domestic succession awaits resolution. The unintended deadly effect of playing the wittol, 'a man who is aware of and complaisant about the infidelity of his wife' (*OED* 1), is that Mosby and Alice find it easier to plot the murder and convince themselves and others they can get away with it.

IV

We are now used to identifying self-disabling as a common tactic deployed by early modern women to express their views in a patriarchal culture that regarded most forms of female speech with suspicion or hostility. Among women writers, frequent use of the traditional modesty topos, for example, was not a conventional display of humility taken from a socially authorized position, as it was for men; rather, such self-depreciating gestures were a cultivated and performative means of crossing gender boundaries into genres and subjects traditionally forbidden to women, and of laying the cultural foundations for a provisional female subjectivity. When such role-playing combines with challenges to conventional knowledge from female-centred perspectives, or with gender advocacy, the overall experience may appear to be uncontrolled, paradoxical, or contradictory.

In Renaissance drama the actual or imaginary cuckold occupies a similarly unstable position. He is an emasculated man whose unwonted emotional vulnerability and irrationality make him typically appear out of control, weak, and womanish.[39] This is the Arden we see and hear semi-privately with Franklin. In his confrontations with Alice and Mosby, Arden's apparent gullibility deepens the sense of male authority alienated from its proper judgment and hence, according to early modern social theory, feminized. When the Ferryman compares the fog, which ultimately (and ironically) preserves Arden from yet another murder attempt, to a 'curst wife' who reduces her husband to tears and drives him from the house, the comparison seems meant to remind us of Arden's domestic exile (xi. 11–15). Yet if we bear in mind the example of early modern women's negotiations of public speech and social resistance through performative disabling, we can consider the possibility that Arden's submission is also a tactical response – which is to say veiled, improvised, and imperfectly controlled – to the looming prospect of patrilineal extinction. In this regard, recent studies of early modern masculinity, which examine the emotional instability that characterized the period's patriarchal ideology, are also helpful. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory and early modern pathologies of melancholy as manifestations of feminized masculine identity, Mark Breitenberg argues that male anxiety is the unavoidable result of a dominant culture committed to perpetuating itself by relying on wives it has constructed as the Other. Early modern men, and in particular those afflicted by jealousy, negotiate their insecure masculinity by publicly representing its disabling effects, especially in the company of other men, in order to allow the display to function as a vehicle of potential re-empowerment. Visible expressions of vulnerability may be a form of 'psychic armour' for the threatened husband seeking to manage and recover a loss of paternal agency.[40] In an earlier study of early modern masculinity, Coppélia Kahn also argued that the cuckold's loss of honour and prestige occurs chiefly among male peers.[41] Crises of early modern masculinity typically take the form not of interiorized psychological ordeals but of performative ones, in which conflicting personal emotions and relationships are played out publicly among men and re-invested with positive social meaning. In *Arden of Faversham* sexual anxiety is conveyed in anecdotal remarks by virtually all the male characters, who occasionally join in defensive alliances against women whom they regard as inherently capricious and deceitful.[42] Such verbal gestures of solidarity play out their common fears of sexual betrayal and fantasies of revenge:

FERRYMAN: ... yet my wife has another moon.
FRANKLIN: Another moon?
FERRYMAN: Ay, and it hath influences and eclipses.
ARDEN: Why, then, by this reckoning you sometimes play
the man in the moon.
FERRYMAN: Ay, but you had not best to meddle with that moon lest I
scratch you by the face with my bramble-bush. (x. 24–30)

Beneath these exchanges of misogynist jocularity lies male aggression toward potential rivals in sexual competition with each other.[43]

V

The melancholy that afflicts Arden in the first half of the play is the playwright's invention, and it sends a conventionally recognized set of signals to his Elizabethan audience. As understood by early modern humoural psychology, melancholy is a physical condition in which the balance of bodily fluids normally regulated by reason becomes destabilized. Since reason is masculine, melancholy is a feminizing tendency. And because early modern natural philosophy assumed a symbolic correspondence between the individual body and social body, melancholy in the widest sense represents everything contrary to a masculine ideal of rationality and order.[44] Arden begins as a classic study in melancholy: heartbroken, gloomy, and suicidal.[45] There is a hint at sexual dysfunction in Franklin's opening words, 'Arden, cheer up thy spirits and droop no more' (i. 1), and as the first scene develops it becomes clear that Arden's sexual drive has been displaced by Mosby's.[46] Given Arden's jealousy and material proof of his wife's infidelity, in the form of intercepted love letters and the ring on Mosby's finger, there exists a conventional social route – and indeed a dramatic script – to follow, which Arden himself outlines in unusually hyperbolic language:

... that injurious ribald that attempts
To violate my dear wife's chastity ...
Shall on the bed which he thinks to defile
See his dissevered joints and sinews torn
Whilst on the planchers pants his weary body,
Smeared in the channels of his lustful blood. (i. 37–8, 40–43)

Arden conflates the humiliating scene of betrayal with re-appropriation of stolen erotic energy through spectacular imagined violence inflicted on the body of the rival. Yet Arden does not name Mosby in this passage as the object of his rage, and he therefore sounds somewhat detached, as if he is checking off theatricalized brutality as a theoretical possibility. He rejects the role of revenger, and allows himself to be persuaded by Franklin to abandon his house to Alice and Mosby on the grounds that women 'when they may will not, / But, being kept back, straight grow outrageous' (i. 52–3). In a manner distantly reminiscent of Iago, Franklin argues in misogynistic clichés that Alice is as bad as any woman whose behaviour lies beyond male control and will not be changed by impatience or reproach. The slightly twisted syntax of these lines betrays the murkiness of Franklin's thinking and the suspect nature of his plan, which turns Arden into a wittol.[47] Yet Arden agrees to this advice despite his awareness that it 'abhors from reason' (i. 54), and he accepts a seemingly emasculated position in the face of his wife's erotic will. Rather than confront his melancholy, Arden consciously re-embraces it, and in doing so he transforms it into an active counter-position. By accepting Franklin's company in London, Arden compensates for his humiliation by staging a public retreat from the scene of his physical and social disgrace. Both these situations can be re-presented as uncommon self-control – masculine restraint substituting as the rarer action for revenge – which earns him Franklin's admiration. At the same time Arden defers reinstatement of his sexual agency by displacing it on to Mosby in order to create an opportunity for producing the heir he desires. But in condoning Alice's adultery, Arden must publicly represent the injury to his social reputation by visibly humiliating Mosby. He does so by confronting him in the presence of Franklin (i. 290–359). Arden first challenges Mosby's familiarity with Alice, but his personal insults shift to social jabs at Mosby's former occupation as a tailor and his pretensions in wearing a sword – the public badge of a gentleman: 'what art thou now but a velvet drudge, / A cheating steward, and base-minded peasant' (i. 322–3). In a moment of pre-empting, Arden degrades Mosby and asserts his superior rank. He must distinguish their social degrees because of Mosby's physical propriety over his wife. By seizing Mosby's sword, Arden appropriates Mosby's phallic energy, much in the same way that he has seized the legacies of Faversham residents Greene and Reede by expropriating their lands. And by assuming the ruling-class privilege of meting out punishment, Arden creates a potent social image for himself, compensating for his loss of masculine pride.[48] Having re-asserted his authority, Arden can then accept Mosby's protestations of innocence,

acting magnanimous and self-possessed as he does so. But when Franklin then reasonably suggests that Mosby, for the sake of avoiding scurrilous rumour, ought to stay clear of Arden's house, Arden overreaches him, discarding Franklin's sensible caution to show that he can rise above such fears, and that his trust in Alice is absolute. While effectively sanctioning the continuance of adultery under his own roof, he departs wishing Mosby to 'think of me / As of your dearest friend' (i. 415–16), having successfully represented himself as liberal-minded and masterful in re-ordering his household.

Arden then veils the threat of cuckoldry and illegitimacy in two confrontations with Alice that publicly test and affirm his wife's chastity. 'Chastity' in this regard means less to Arden as the exclusive possession of Alice's body than in its symbolic function as the warrant of patriarchal legitimacy. Arden accordingly represents Alice as faithful, and her relationship with Mosby as innocent, in order to mediate his surrender of her body and the yielding of his sexual rights:

ARDEN: But this night, sweet Alice, thou hast killed my heart:
I heard thee call on Mosby in thy sleep.
ALICE: 'Tis like I was asleep when I named him,
For being awake he comes not in my thoughts.
ARDEN: Ay, but you started up and suddenly,
Instead of him, caught me about the neck.
ALICE: Instead of him? Why, who was there but you?
And where but one is how can I mistake?
FRANKLIN: Arden, leave to urge her overfar.
ARDEN: Nay, love, there is no credit in a dream.
Let it suffice I know thou lovest me well. (i. 65–75)

Franklin's intervention is Arden's cue to turn the ambiguity of Alice's quick-witted evasions to his own advantage. Franklin's participation here and throughout the play is crucial because he stands for public judgment which restores Arden's masculine identity and validates his potential paternity.[49] Moreover, Arden knows that when directly challenged he can rely on Alice and Mosby playing their parts in denying the affair, strategic denials he can usefully accept, since they publicize his freedom from jealousy and maintain the necessary fiction of Alice's fidelity. Later in this scene, Franklin again reflects back on Arden these renegotiations of his patriarchal authority:

FRANKLIN: Then, Mosby, to eschew the speech of men,
Upon whose general bruit all honour hangs,
Forbear his house.
ARDEN: Forbear it! Nay, rather frequent it more.
The world shall see that I distrust her not. (i. 346–50)

Within the restrictions on his personal agency created by Alice's cuckoldry and the absence of an heir, Arden improvises a new public reputation by actively staging his forbearance as masculine virtue.

During the second clash toward the end of the play, when Mosby and Alice taunt Arden by walking arm-in-arm before him and kissing openly, Arden's emotional reversal is more extreme. As they hoped, their ambush takes him by surprise and he explodes in rage. His language momentarily reverts to that of the revenge 'script' he rejected in the first scene: 'Injurious strumpet and thou ribald knave, / Untwine those arms' (xiii. 78–9). After wounding Mosby in a fight, however, he recovers his 'female' flexibility by accepting Alice's completely implausible excuses and begging her to forgive his 'fault': 'Forget but this and never see the like. / Impose me penance, and I will perform it' (xiii. 118–19).[50] To Franklin's further amazement, he asks Alice to be a 'mediator' (xiii. 134) between him and Mosby and remorsefully invites him home for dinner, without Alice's urging and in the teeth of her objections (which may not be entirely feigned). Franklin becomes disgusted by Alice's specious explanations and Arden's apparent false consciousness. The disjunct is so strong that perhaps it dawns on him that Arden must be colluding willingly for personal reasons. Despite direct proof of Alice and Mosby's malice, however, Arden publicly rebukes Franklin, siding with his wife and expressing concern for Mosby's wounds. Franklin distances himself from Arden at the end of the scene, which he can see only as some kind of Faustian bargain – which in a way it is ('He whom the devil drives must go perforce' (xiii. 152)). The playwright here deliberately alters his source material to heighten Arden's apparently baffling reactions. Holinshed records that Ardern refused to fight with Mosby no matter how greatly he was provoked. By having Arden do so, and then flamboyantly repudiate his own aggression, the play rewrites his passivity as tactical self-disabling, thereby reinterpreting the chronicle's silence or inability towards explaining Ardern's motives.

In the end, Arden's intense preoccupation with his own interests blinds him to his enemies' plans. The play suggests that their success represents something less than providential retribution against Arden's predatory business practices, and something more than a lucky coalition of private grievances and illicit

ambitions. The power of Alice and Mosby's personal desires is not only projected into the community but also relationally dependent on Arden's opportunistic tolerance and improvised subjectivity. His own ultimately losing gamble with adultery has its motives in the unstable political ideology of male dynastic inheritance and the cultural pressures of early modern masculinity. Arden tries but fails to uphold the procreative obligations of his material legacy as the king's man in Faversham.[51]

Notes

1 I shall refer to the dramatic character as Arden and the historical figure as Ardern, as his name is often spelled in early texts.

2 As Catherine Belsey observes: 'What is contested is these [historical] re-presentations is not, on the whole, the morality of the murder, but its explanation, its meaning. Specific areas of the story are foregrounded or reduced, with the effect of modifying the crime's significance' ('Alice Arden's Crime', in *Staging the Renaissance*, David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (eds) (London, 1991), 134). An earlier version of this essay appears in Belsey's *The Subject of Tragedy* (London, 1985), 129–48. My concern is with the dramatist's representation of Arden's role and behaviour.

3 Quoted in *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham*, M.L. Wine (ed) (London, 1973), 160. All quotations from the play and its historical sources are taken from this edition. Wine proposes 'fedd him' for 'fedd her', making Mosby the person who is seduced by Alice. This follows the 1592 title-page in ascribing dominant agency to her. But the Wardmote reading is not an obvious error, while the 1592 title-page's purpose is to sensationalize and moralize female wickedness for commercial purposes. The earliest account in the *Breviat Chronicle,* made shortly after the murder occurred in 1551, simply records the fact of the crime (Wine, xxxvii).

4 The anonymous playwright re-situates the historical murder in a wider cultural context of economic competition and social dislocation in which emergent bourgeois individualism was replacing traditional feudal reciprocity. These material factors have been extensively explored by recent critics: David Attwell, 'Property, Status, and the Subject in a Middle-class Tragedy: *Arden of Faversham', English Literary Renaissance* 21 (1991), 328–48; Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Man's House as His Castle in *Arden of Feversham', Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 2 (1985), 57–89; Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr, '"Arden lay

murdered in that plot of ground": Surveying, Land, and *Arden of Faversham', ELH* 61 (1994), 231–52; Frank Whigham, 'Hunger and Pain in *Arden of Faversham', in Seizures of the Will in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge, 1996), ch. 2, 63–120. But as Michael Neill observes, these efforts to recontextualize the murder have tended to obscure 'the theatrical life of the play and its quality as a dramatic artifact', and to avoid 'detailed analysis of [the text itself]. The consequences ... are not simply aesthetic; for a fully informed historicism cannot afford to overlook the way in which texts, at the level of the most intricate verbal detail, are vehicles of historical meaning' (Michael Neill, '"This Gentle Gentleman": Social Change and the Language of Status in *Arden of Faversham', Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 10 (1998), 73).

5 The dramatist conveys the town's anxieties about Arden's household in the unusual role played by the Mayor towards the end of the play. He arrives prior to any knowledge of Arden's disappearance, and independently of Franklin, who leaves separately to investigate his suspicions of murder. The Mayor admits to already having had Arden and Mosby under surveillance when both men earlier entered Arden's house (Alice: How now, Master Mayor, have you brought my husband home? Mayor: I saw him come into your house an hour ago (xiv. 362–3)). And in the final scene, unhistorically and anomalously, it is the Mayor, a civic and mercantile official, and not an assize judge or magistrate, who sentences the criminals and sends them to execution. The Wardmote account states that Alice, Mosby, his sister Cicely, Michael, and Bradshaw were 'indicted and arreygned w^{t}in thesaid towne and lib[er]tyes of Fau^{r}sham in the Abbey Halle wch ye said Ardern p[ur]chased and there adiudged for to dye' (Wine, 161–2).

6 Lord Cheney does not specify the 'divers matters'he wishes to discuss when he and Arden encounter one another on the road in Kent. But he immediately puts Arden on the defensive by remarking on his lack of any accompanying servants, (ix. 102–4), which suggests he is on the lookout for further signs of Arden's social delinquency. Cheney peremptorily invites Arden to return with him to his house. The scene's context, Arden's surprisingly fawning deference, and his earlier statements imply that Cheney's 'matters' at least partly concerns Arden's inaction toward the affair.

7 Holinshed's stated justification – at once obvious and oblique – is on the grounds of 'horribleness' (Wine, 148). This explanation is accompanied by the marginal printed note quoted in my title.

8 Wine, 149.

9 In most other places the MS closely anticipates Holinshed and may have been its source; see 'The history of a most horible murder comytyd at ffevershame in Kent', BL Harley MS 542, ff. 34–7B (Wine, xlii).
10 Wine, 149.
11 Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550–1700* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1994), 74.
12 Whigham, *Seizures of the Will*, 63ff.
13 Orlin, 'Man's House as His Castle', 58–67.
14 Neill, 'This Gentle Gentleman', 80 and *passim*.
15 William Harrison, *The Description of England*, Georges Edelen (ed) (Ithaca, NY, 1968), 117.
16 Harrison, *Description of England*, 118.
17 Daughters continually encountered legal challenges to inheriting from collateral male relations. See for example the disputes recorded by Lady Anne Clifford (in R. Martin, *Women Writers in Renaissance England* (London, 1997), 249–74). See also Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York, 1978), 7.
18 Orlin, 'Man's House as His Castle', 67–8.
19 Holinshed quoted in Wine, 159.
20 A marginal printed note in Holinshed moralizes the point: 'God heareth the teares of the oppressed and taketh vengeance: note an example in Arden' (quoted in Wine, 159).
21 Neill, 'This Gentle Gentleman', 90–1.
22 John M. Breen, 'The Carnival Body in *Arden of Faversham', Cahiers Elisabéthains* 45 (1994), 15, 19. Michael's violent energies are redirected, however, against a surrogate figure of patriarchal authority in his participation in Arden's murder. By conniving at Mosby's affair and keeping him available for Alice, Arden recalls another instance of a triangular relationship set up by Shakebag, who once kept 'The widow Chambley in her husband's days' (xv.1).
23 Whigham, *Seizures of the Will*, 63.
24 Retha M. Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* (Cambridge, 1989), 46–52.
25 G.R. Elton, *England Under the Tudors*, 2nd ed (London, 1974), 99–100.
26 Warnicke, *Anne Boleyn*, 5.
27 Belsey cites Heinrich Bullinger's frequently reprinted *The Christen State of Matrimonye* (1541), which recommended divorce 'not only for adultery but also for "lyke and greater occasions"' ('Alice Arden's Crime', 143). Early

modern readers would surely have thought of Henry's divorce, a response to potential danger to the state, as one of these 'occasions'.

28 Their relationship was visibly suggested by Brian Purchase's appearance as Arden in the memorable 1982 RSC production directed by Terry Hands at The Other Place. With his long square face, ermine-lined gown, and large imposing stature, Purchase readily called to mind well-known portraits of Henry.

29 Orlin, 'Man's House as His Castle', 86 n43.

30 'Ay, now I see, and too soon find it true, / Which often hath been told me by my friends, / That Mosby loves me not but for my wealth, / Which, too incredulous, I ne'er believed' (viii. 106–9).

31 Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1996), 56. In Terry Hands' 1982 production, a large leafless bough overhanging the stage seemed to symbolize the sterility of the play's sexual relationships.

32 Black Will mirrors Arden in other ways too, such as their shared thirst for wealth and status, and their self-theatricalizing – and in Will's case heroically mythologizing – tendencies (eg xiv. 5–29).

33 On the other hand, Alice says in her first speech to Arden, 'Summer nights are short, and yet you rise ere day. / Had I been wake, you had not rise so soon' (i. 58–9), which prompts a seemingly incongruous, and perhaps histrionic, Ovidian recollection of their former affection (i. 60–4). The continual role-playing by both parties makes it difficult to say with certainty what the present state of their intimate life is.

34 Henry had earlier rejected Rome's desperate suggestion that Mary should marry his bastard son Henry Fitzroy, whom Henry had made duke of Richmond, to create a symbolic identification with his father Henry VII, who as a Lancastrian under that title had married Elizabeth of York and thus united the feuding houses of the Wars of the Roses (Elton, *England under the Tudors*, 100). Under Henry VIII, the Tudor claim to the throne had been confirmed but was still relatively insecure and continued to be challenged by dissident contenders.

35 For example, Whigham, *Seizures of the Will*, 69.

36 The manuscript account is more pointed, referring to 'some benefits of the lord northe by meanes of this mosby who could do muche w^{t} hym, he winked...' (Wine, 149). Stow's *Annals* (1592) also focuses on Mosby's role through Lord North in advantaging Ardern. But according to Wine, the dramatist consulted only Holinshed (xxxvii–xliii).

37 I have in mind here Michel de Certeau's distinction between strategic and tactical modes of action: Alice and Mosby act strategically as subjects with the social and (apparent) financial power to dominate and manipulate Arden's already vulnerable patriarchal authority by cuckolding him. Arden responds tactically to these constraints, attempting to improvise within them to create opportunities and advantages that serve his own interests. See *The Practice of Everyday Life*, transl. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1984), 34–9.

38 Franklin initially proposes that they lie at London 'all this term' (the Elizabethan law term lasted eight weeks). But subsequent action involving the hired killers indicates that Arden returns home much sooner. In scene iv he reconsiders his decision after Franklin fails to persuade him to stay in London (see lines 28–30; indeed this passage suggests that Arden cannot resist staying away from home too long). And by scene vi he is making plans to journey by water to Faversham, where he arrives in scene x.

39 Coppélia Kahn identifies three factors that contribute to making the early modern cuckold: misogyny (the belief among men that all women are predisposed to lust and deceit); the sexual double standard; and patriarchal marriage, in which men's power over women makes them dependent on their wife's chastity and thus vulnerable to women as well. "'The Savage Yoke": Cuckoldry and Marriage', *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1981), ch. 5, 119–50. See also Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (London and New York, 1999), 104–7.

40 Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 6.

41 Kahn, *Man's Estate*, 19.

42 Besides the Ferryman, see Michael, i. 149–60; Mosby, viii. 40–1; Clarke, x. 64–73. The telling exception is Franklin, untroubled by female relationships and masculine anxiety.

43 Kahn, *Man's Estate*, 142–4; Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 127.

44 As Robert Burton observed in his exhaustive study of the subject, 'the chiefest causes [of melancholy] proceed from the heart, humours, spirits: as they are purer, or impurer, so is the mind, & equally suffers, as a lute out of tune; if one string or one organ be distempered, all the rest miscarry' (*Anatomy of Melancholy*, 319, I, 2, quoted in Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 53).

45 See especially Arden's speeches at i. 9–14, iv. 32–4, vi. 6–27. Arden's vulnerability and shame were strikingly portrayed in the opening moments of Buzz Goodbody's 1970 RSC production at the Roundhouse, when Arden stood

naked in front of the audience (some of whom walked out). After Arden begins his journey home to Faversham from London, however, his melancholy disappears.

46 Breen, 'The Carnival Body', 15.

47 Franklin's proposed course of (in)action also contrasts strikingly with his later story to Arden (ix. 62–88) of a wife directly accused of adultery by her husband, whose swift and unshrinking reproof is vindicated by the woman's tearful public confession and penitence.

48 Alexandra Shepard, 'Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England *c*. 1580–1640', *Past and Present* 167 (2001), 101–5.

49 The huge increase in prosecutions for sexual offences in the church courts, as well as defamation suits involving sexual slander, 'support the argument for a social basis for identity in what has been described as a shame culture' (Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 19).

50 Several reviewers of Katie Mitchell's 1990 Classics on a Shoestring production remarked on the element of conscious choice in Arden's acceptance of his wife's excuses (eg Annalena McAfee, *Evening Standard*, 10 August 1990; Paul Taylor, *The Independent*, 11 August).

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