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## Public and Private Performance of Guilt in Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness*

IN HIS *AN APOLOGY FOR ACTORS*, Thomas Heywood writes "plays are writ with this aim . . . to teach the subjects obedience to the King, to show the people the ultimate ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections, to present them with the flourishing estate of such as live in obedience, exhorting them to allegiance, dehorting them from all traitorous and felonious stratagems."<sup>1</sup> He also asserts that it is through dramatic action that we can arrive at "the nearest way to plant understanding in the hearts of the ignorant."<sup>2</sup> Through observing the dramatic action of a play, the audience, therefore, can learn how they are to conduct their lives. Laura Bromley discusses how during the Elizabethan period middle class citizens turned to conduct books for instruction on behaviour, saying "the Elizabethan middle class had an enormous appetite for information and guidance on how to conduct their private, domestic lives."<sup>3</sup> She further adds, however, that another place where the Elizabethan public could douse this appetite for information was at the playhouse: domestic tragedy was specifically dedicated to this class and to their appetites. Therefore, in Bromley's view, the theatre, and domestic tragedy in particular, became an extension of the conduct book: the theatre was a place to display the private in the public forum. It was also a public place where playgoers could learn how to conduct themselves in their private lives. Heywood's asser-

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, ed. J.W. Binns (New York, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972) F4.

<sup>2</sup> Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* F4r.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Bromley, "Domestic Conduct in *A Woman Killed With Kindness*," *SEL* 26 (1986): 262.

tions, however, purport that the domestic tragedy could offer something that the Elizabethan conduct books could not: it allowed the spectators to peer into the private lives of the characters on the stage. They could witness individual moral regression and peer into the characters' lives that, arguably, represented their own circumstances. The dramatic action of the plays offered a mimetic process that otherwise could not be ascertained by reading the conduct books.

The genre of domestic tragedy emerged in the late sixteenth century with the production of *Arden of Faversham*. Other domestic tragedies, such as *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, *The English Traveller*, and *A Woman Killed With Kindness* were to follow *Arden* shortly thereafter. Domestic tragedies stand apart from earlier and later tragedies of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period because they differ in subject, characterization, and form: they are about common people; the scene itself is domestic; and the action of the play deals with familial relationships as opposed to large affairs of the state; thus, the action, the scene, and the characters themselves are presented to the audience with realism. H.H. Adams writes that the force behind domestic tragedy is theological instruction—its purpose is to teach a Christian moral lesson to the audience by showing the consequence of an individual's sin. Adams writes: "Elizabethan domestic tragedies inculcated lessons of morality and religious faith in the citizens who came to the theatres by offering them examples drawn from the lives and customs of their own people."<sup>4</sup> Domestic tragedies differed fundamentally from earlier tragedies such as Norton's *Gorboduc*, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, and Marlowe's *Edward the Second*, because while these tragedies certainly showed the audience a tragic hero's struggle with vice and virtue, they still left room for the audience members to deny any association with the main characters and plot: audience members would view the tragedy as a story about others and not about themselves. Domestic tragedy, therefore, brought the private lives of contemporary playgoers onto the public stage of the playhouse.

Tragedies, according to Heywood, "were presented in order to terrify men from like abhorred practices."<sup>5</sup> The dramatization of this terror was, again, something that the theatre could offer that the conduct books could not. Contemporary conduct books certainly were intended to teach the citizens, but they could not achieve what Heywood believed the theatre could. They could not show the act of moral transgression or how it is played out. Morality plays, according to Heywood, "were to persuade men to humanity

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<sup>4</sup> H.H. Adams, *English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy* (New York: Columbia UP, 1965) viii.

<sup>5</sup> Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* F4.

and good life."<sup>6</sup> In this sense, Heywood's notion of tragedy and morality suggests that the domestic tragedy, particularly *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, takes on a form more closely resembling that of the medieval morality plays. Morality plays in general focus on the repentance and rehabilitation of an individual sinner. They contain moral, allegorical instruction; the protagonist of a morality play is usually a man who represents all mankind; and the action of the play moves from an alienation of God to a return to God. Adams writes that domestic tragedy "borrowed many of its most effective dramatic devices and its most important conventions from morality plays,"<sup>7</sup> and Michael Wentworth shows how Heywood's play follows the same structure of the medieval morality play.<sup>8</sup>

*A Woman Killed With Kindness* opens with the marriage of Anne and Master Frankford. After the wedding, his friend Master Wendoll remains in the Frankford house and quickly falls into lust for Anne. She is swiftly won over by Wendoll's advancements; the adultery is eventually exposed; she is banished from the world she knows; she spends her time in penance as she travails through shame and despair; and eventually dies as a result of self-starvation. Both Adams and Wentworth show how Heywood's play resembles morality plays: instead of 'everyman,' Anne represents 'everywoman'; she is exposed to good and bad, and she chooses wrong; she descends spiritually and death strikes her down, yet not before she can repent for her sins. Master Frankford forgives her, and she is therefore saved from damnation. Wentworth's argument furthers that of Adams by postulating that Heywood's play "provides a dramatic reenactment of the process of repentance."<sup>9</sup> The difference, however, between Heywood's play and the morality plays is that the morality plays deal with eternal truths and not with narratives; they are not set in time and place; they deal with only one individual's sin (albeit representing everyone's sin); they are allegorical in their presentation, so there is naturally a separation between the real world and the world of the play. Finally, unlike the morality plays, *A Woman Killed With Kindness* shows how the immorality of one individual has its consequences for others. Anne Frankford is primarily employed, as Adams writes, "to teach a moral lesson by her conduct,"<sup>10</sup> but the focus of much

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<sup>6</sup> *An Apology for Actors* F4.

<sup>7</sup> Adams, *English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy* 73.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Wentworth, "A Woman Killed With Kindness as Domestic Morality," in *Traditions and Innovations: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Wentworth, "A Woman Killed With Kindness as Domestic Morality" 150.

<sup>10</sup> Adams, *English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy* 157.

criticism tends to center only on the moral lesson of what the private act of adultery does to the private relationship between husband and wife or what it does to Anne Frankford's social position. I believe that Heywood's moral lesson extends beyond marital or personal implications—it is more than just a play about how to punish adulterers or about the moral transgression of female virtue: as Paula McQuade correctly asserts, “Heywood did intend his tragedy to educate its spectators, but what he wanted to teach was not the simple, general lesson that one should avoid adultery.”<sup>11</sup> Instead, Heywood asks the audience to consider what effect an individual's private act has on the public community. The play offers an examination of how an individual's sin that is acted out in private can have communal and public consequences. Heywood intentionally blurs the lines between public and private, between internal and external spaces, and between the individual and the community to show how Anne's actions fracture the relationships of the entire community within Frankford's household.

Heywood's notions of public and private space in the play are difficult to decipher, mostly because Heywood intentionally complicates and compromises the two. *A Woman Killed With Kindness* examines many corners of both the public and private space, but the most intriguing spaces are those within the main plot of the play. Heywood gives us more or less a triple layer of public and private space. Working from the inside out, the absolute interior and private space, according to Heywood, is inside Anne Frankford's bedroom; the next layer would be the domestic space within the Frankford household, which is sometimes private and sometimes public; and finally, the space outside of the household is the external public space. Heywood complicates these spaces and forces them onto one another by permitting certain characters the ability to go in and out of these spaces, by bringing characters from one space to another, and by making certain spaces off limits—particularly to the audience. The middle layer of space is most interesting because it is here where I believe Heywood blurs the idea of public and private space. The way I propose we peer into these spaces is through an examination of Anne Frankford—particularly through an examination of her sin, her attempt to keep the public and private separate, and the gradual externalization of her guilt.

Anne Frankford's guilt is compounded because she suffers not only internally but also externally. The struggle to control or even negotiate her combined private and public guilt is recognizable in the moments imme-

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<sup>11</sup> Paula McQuade, “‘A Labyrinth of Sin’: Marriage and Moral Capacity in Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness*,” *Modern Philology* 98 (2000): 234.

diately before she physically falls from grace. Anne says that she is quickly moved “to passion and to pity” after Wendoll’s brief rhetorical seduction (VI.189),<sup>12</sup> and she expresses her fears to him and to the audience saying “My fault, I fear, will in my brow be writ. / Women that fall not quite bereft of grace / Have their offences noted in their face. / I blush and am ashamed” (VI.154–157). Regardless of how Anne acts publicly, she knows that her internal guilt could betray her through one small public gesture: blushing. At the same time, she is suggesting that because it is writ in her brow, she is destined to lie with Wendoll. She is transferring all responsibility to God—to an external ‘other’—in order to be able to perform acts for the self and to protect her internal self. After she gives herself over to providence, she then gives herself over to Wendoll. Anne’s privacy is not betrayed, however, by what is written on her face, but rather by Wendoll’s perpetration of a private act in a public space. He kisses Anne before they exit to the bedroom, and one of the servants witnesses the private act. Master Frankford’s house thereby becomes a place where the public and private spaces are blurred; even though Anne and Wendoll think they are alone, their privacy is compromised because they are in a public space of the house. As the play progresses, the spaces become more indistinct. Nick vows to “henceforth turn a spy / And watch [Anne and Wendoll] in their close conveyances,” so as to “have an eye / In all of their gestures” (VI.175, 179–80). Nick vows to move in and out of the private and public spheres in order to be able to tell his Master what is occurring behind closed doors, and he tells the audience that he loves his master and his mistress, “but these tricks [he likes] not”; furthermore, he asserts that his master “shall not pocket up this wrong” (VI.167, 168). Nick simply recognizes the vice of adultery, and vows to try to keep his master from playing the fool.

Anne’s internal struggle with her guilt manifests in her language in Heywood’s famous card playing scene. Before the card game, Nick tells Frankford about the affair between Wendoll and Anne, and the scene becomes a combination of Frankford’s struggle to keep his anger private and Anne’s struggle to keep her guilt private. The scene is filled with gaming language that is charged with double meanings, which the audience and possibly the characters themselves easily recognize; for instance, when the players are asked what game they would play, Wendoll replies saying that Frankford “play[s] best at Noddy” (VIII.141). The *OED* gives at least nine different definitions for the word ‘noddy,’ but the two contemporary

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, ed. Brian Scobie, First Mermaid Edition (New York: W.W. Norton) 1998. All subsequent page references in parentheses.

usages that Heywood's audience would have recognized would have been that it is both a card game (resembling cribbage) and a term for fool or cuckold. Nick uses similar language saying that the game that Wendoll is best at is "Knave out of Doors" (VIII.149), which is another card game but also another play on words because 'knave' also means 'rascal.'<sup>13</sup> After almost fifty lines of banter between Wendoll, Nick, and Frankford, Anne speaks her only aside of the entire scene. As Frankford's language becomes more explicit, Anne's guilt grows with it, finally manifesting when she says, "Would I had never dealt" (VIII.174). While her aside is spoken in the context of the card game, it can only be interpreted as an expression of her guilt—Anne wishes she had never distributed herself sexually. Her aside is part of the process of the externalization of her guilt into the public sphere. Regardless of her inability to do so, Anne works to keep her private acts separate from her public; but what proves most difficult for her is the internal compartmentalization of her guilt.

Heywood's stagecraft of the combination of public and private within this scene cannot go unmentioned. The participants in the card game are Frankford, Anne, Wendoll, and Master Cranwell. At the beginning of this scene, two servants exchange dialogue, and the audience hears that the servants recognize Wendoll as a "daily guest," as opposed to Cranwell who only came to the house earlier that afternoon (VIII.8). This exchange between the two servants is important because it sets up the two metaphoric levels of the card-playing scene. Cranwell, while still a friend of Frankford, is also external to Frankford's household—he represents the public. The servants of the house see Wendoll as being part of the household community—he is part of that private and domestic sphere. Cranwell has less than five lines in this scene, but his presence is more important: he represents the difficulty of keeping the private out of the public sphere and the tendency of the public to infringe on the private. Cranwell's presence also restricts other character's access to the private realm—Frankford himself calls the game short not only to escape from his wife and Wendoll but also to escape from the eye of the public and to move into the interior private spaces of his home.

As Anne continues to try to keep the public and the private separate, she struggles not against herself but against Wendoll. As soon as Frankford leaves the house, merely pretending to be called away on business, Wendoll turns to Anne and says "My pleasure is / We will not sup abroad so publicly, / But in your private bed chamber, Mistress Frankford" (XI.90–92). Anne chides him saying "O sir, you are too public in your love, / And Master

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<sup>13</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

Frankford's wife—" (XI.93-93). Her remarks are interrupted by the public voice—the line of speech itself is severed as Cranwell interrupts their private conversation. His presence reminds both the characters and the audience that regardless of what private words Anne and Wendoll are exchanging, they are still in a public space of the house and under the gaze of the public eye. Anne struggles with her guilt once more in this scene, but at the same time she acknowledges how dangerous public suspicions are. She cries,

O what a clog unto the soul is sin.  
 We pale offenders are, still full of fear;  
 Every suspicious eye brings danger near,  
 When they whose clear heart from offence are free  
 Despite report, base scandals do outface,  
 And stand at mere defiance with disgrace. (XI.103-08)

Despite her lamentation, she is able to push aside her guilt and lie once again with Wendoll. To do so, she once again transfers blame to the other, placing it this time on Wendoll and on habitual practice.

Curiously, while Heywood is able to bring the audience into the middle space of public and private of the Frankford household, the audience is not permitted into the private space of the bedroom. The private actions that occur in the interior space of Frankford's house are only brought to the exterior through dialogue. The card-playing scene is the first place where the implied private actions of Anne and Wendoll are externalized; later, their actions are also implied in an exchange between two of Frankford's servants, Jenkin and Sisly. Jenkin tells Sisly that because Anne and Wendoll have retired to the bedchamber for supper, Sisly has been "preferred from being the cook to [being the] chambermaid" (XII.2-3). Her response to Jenkin is simply in the proverbial: "When the cat's away, the mouse may play" (XII.5-6). Jenkin claims that he smells a rat, and Frankford follows this same scent to the door of Anne's bedchamber. Because the audience is not permitted into that private space, Heywood has Frankford exit the stage and reenter once he has seen what has occurred in the interior space of his house and the further interior space of his wife's bed. He tells Nick, and the audience, that he has "found [Anne and Wendoll] lying / Close in each other's arms, and fast asleep" (XIII.43-44). The sin itself remains in the private sphere, and the audience is content to accept Frankford's report. Heywood refrains from bringing the audience into the bedroom because it is not the private space that he wants the audience to focus on: the audience is only allowed as far as the bedroom door because it is the fracturing of the domestic space of the house, of that middle public and private layer, that Heywood wants the audience to see. It is not important what Anne

and Wendoll do in the interior of the house; what is important, rather, is that what they do in the privacy of the bedroom affects the public space of the household. Bromley writes "Heywood is more concerned with the social consequences of the crime than the moral consequences of the sin."<sup>14</sup> Heywood is more concerned with the social consequences of the crime than he is with the sin altogether.

Frankford returns to the interior space to wake the couple and to chase Wendoll out of the bedroom and across the stage. Frankford, filled with anger once again, withdraws out of the public space to decide on Anne's punishment in private. Anne is left alone on the stage with Nick—the spying eye—and she becomes a dramatization of the rules of conduct. She says,

O women, women, you that have yet kept  
Your holy matrimonial vow unstained,  
Make me your instance: when you tread awry  
Your sins like mine will on your conscience lie. (XIII.142–45)

Nick's presence is important here because he represents another step she takes towards externalizing her guilt; however, Anne does not completely publicize her guilt, or her own recognition of it, until the entire household joins her in that domestic space. During the commotion after Frankford reveals the adulterers, all of the servants who are "newly come out of bed" enter on to the stage (s.d. XIII.145). Their entrance signifies the effect that private acts have on the whole household. Together, in chorus form, they say, "O mistress, mistress, what have you done, mistress?" (XIII.146). Anne's response to them signifies the complete externalization of her guilt. She says, "See what guilt is: here stand I in this place / Ashamed to look my servants in the face" (XIII.152–53). She no longer transfers blame to another or attempts to push aside any guilt. Her adultery affects the entire Frankford household, and she, appropriately, comes out of the interior space of the bedroom into the domestic and public space of the household that she has compromised.

Frankford sends Anne away because of her actions, and the household, the public and private space, metaphorically collapses. She has been expelled from the interior space of the bedroom and the middle public and private space of the house, and she is sent out into the external public space, where we are told, "all mourn to see [her] so sad" (XVI.12). In an act of penance, Anne must travel through a public sphere, taking some of the servants with her, symbolizing how her actions have completely destroyed the community that once existed inside the Frankford household. This

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<sup>14</sup> Bromley, "Domestic Conduct in *A Woman Killed With Kindness*" 271.



separation of the servants, therefore, exemplifies what Heywood is asking the audience to observe: half of the servants are removed from Frankford's home, and they are separated from each other, showing that the community has been fractured because of one individual's sin. The growth of the individual causes the collapse of the community and sends everything into chaos. Anne is forced to occupy a different space in one of Frankford's other houses. The external sphere once again imposes on this space, and we are told "many gentlemen and gentlewomen of the country [have] come to comfort her" (XVII.37–38). At this point, Anne no longer tries to hide from the public gaze, and she no longer tries to hide her guilt. In a complete reversal from the beginning of the play, she wants to make sure that all can see the guilt in her face and in her actions. She says, "Blush I not? / . . . Can you not read my fault in my cheek? / Is not my crime there?" (XVII.55–57). Anne shows her utter shame and guilt in the form of suicide. She starves herself, all the time knowing that she must be forgiven if she is to get into heaven—the ultimate eternal space. Frankford does arrive in time, and he forgives her of all her transgressions. He takes her hand, and all those present witness, once again, the marriage between Frankford and Anne, merely moments before she dies.

As the play is coming to its close, Heywood's purpose becomes absolutely clear. Even so, both Jennifer Panek and Paula McQuade are troubled by Frankford's actions. Panek suggests that Frankford takes "a kind of cruel satisfaction in his revenge," and his sentence is a way that he can avoid implicated himself in any crime.<sup>15</sup> Panek asserts at the end of the play "we are meant to see how far from charity [Frankford's] sentence really is."<sup>16</sup> Likewise, McQuade believes Frankford's language "reveals his wish to cause [Anne] pain."<sup>17</sup> In contrast, other critics are inclined to ask why Heywood would have Frankford send his wife away. If Heywood thought that tragedy was to teach, and possibly move the audience to pity and fear, then why would Anne's punishment—of being simply removed from the private sphere—be so lenient? Simply put, Anne's punishment is not what Heywood wants the audience to focus on. Panek claims the play "is an exemplum how *not* to treat a repentant adulteress,"<sup>18</sup> yet Panek is missing Heywood's intention here because it is neither the act of adultery nor the punishment of the adultery that Heywood wants to exemplify: the play is

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Panek, "Punishing Adultery in *A Woman Killed With Kindness*," *SEL* 34 (1994): 370.

<sup>16</sup> "Punishing Adultery in *A Woman Killed With Kindness*" 375.

<sup>17</sup> McQuade, "A Labyrinth of Sin" 248.

<sup>18</sup> Panek, "Punishing Adultery in *A Woman Killed With Kindness*" 363.

not “a simplistic exemplum on the dangers of adultery.”<sup>19</sup> Heywood’s intention is grounded in his belief that tragic action is what would bring sense into the minds of what he calls ‘the ignorant.’ Anne’s brother at the end of the play says to Frankford, “Brother, had you with threats and usage bad / Punished her sin, the grief of her offence / Had not with such true sorrow touched her heart” (XVII.133–35). These lines show how Frankford’s actions force Anne’s externalization of guilt: if Frankford punished Anne in the way that the conduct books suggested he could, she would not have felt the pain, guilt, or shame of her grief. In the same sense, if Frankford punished Anne in any other way, the audience would not have experienced the dramatization of that same pain, guilt, and shame. Furthermore, the dramatization of Anne’s guilt shows through dramatic action that the play is an exemplum of how an individual’s private acts, regardless of what space they are performed in, do affect the public community. Heywood has Anne go through a process of externalizing her guilt—forcing her from the private sphere into the public sphere—and at the same time the dramatic action and the genre of domestic tragedy allows the audience to experience the same process: the audience witnesses the punishment of one of their own and, like her, experiences the grief of her offence. It is in this way that Heywood can demonstrate and accomplish something that the conduct books could not. Heywood conflates the domestic tragedy with the morality play and adapts the two to show that morality extends beyond the individual—beyond the private. The audience is able to experience the grief of Anne’s actions, and Heywood is able to close any space between the public stage and the private lives of the playgoers.

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<sup>19</sup> McQuade, “A Labyrinth of Sin” 250.