
Katherine Gordon and the Art of Marriage Brokering in *Perkin Warbeck*

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The title character of John Ford's masterpiece *Perkin Warbeck* suffers from an overwhelming concern with proving the rightfulness of his claim upon the British throne. Such concern is expected according to Jean Howard, who states "the Renaissance history play is also an anxious and unstable genre which at once insists that a strong and stable monarchy is essential to the health of the entire social order and simultaneously reveals the precariousness of monarchical power" (261). What Perkin lacks, then, is confidence in the legitimacy of his actions, and his boastful speech acts throughout the play belie an uncertainty of justification that what he proposes to do — acquire Britain through war under the veneer of legal surety — is not right. What is an emergent young royal to do?

The most logical approach to solving this problem of legitimacy is to marry someone in the desired socio-economic position, so that what Perkin says more convincingly resembles the truth. What this social climbing, self-made salesman needs, therefore, is a good woman; "good" not in the sense of obedient, but economically and politically viable, powerfully connected to a social status to which Perkin has no other legitimate access. The answer to Perkin's needs is Katherine Gordon, a princess and royal relative of James IV of Scotland. By aligning himself with Katherine, Perkin's anxiety of creating rightfulness will be allayed as his goals are subsumed under the ægis Katherine provides. Gayle Rubin's anthropological trafficking theories help us interrogate a new approach to the traffic in women which reveals, with specific reference to *Perkin Warbeck*, the center of power Katherine creates in her successful empowerment of the domestic sphere, and one into which she allows Perkin to tap.

Seeking the benefits from an arranged marriage is an aspect of royal life as old as royalty itself. As Mary Beth Rose argues, "throughout the heroics of marriage the conceptualization of women is riddled with ironies and paradoxes that are continually inscribed but inconsistently acknowledged" (126), and this gap —

both in the sex/gender system¹ of the day and the literature produced by a male playwright bound up in that system — creates a negotiating space in which female characters like Katherine can maneuver themselves into profitable marriages. While Perkin's role in his own achievements should not be ignored, his challenge to authority would not be perceived as imbued with the *rightfulness* with which he is so concerned if Katherine is not a willing participant. It is this inextricable and co-dependent relationship to which Coppélia Kahn refers when she suggests "though it [patriarchy] gives men control over women, it also makes them dependent on women indirectly and overtly for the validation of their manhood. Paradoxically, their power over women also makes them vulnerable to women" (17). According to the model of conduct and female necessity explored here in relation to *Perkin Warbeck*, Kahn does not go far enough in her recognition of Katherine's accomplishments in brokering a lucrative contract for herself despite an ultimate appropriation by the sex/gender system in which she exists. However, Kahn does speak to Perkin's vulnerability and reliance upon Katherine to achieve his goal and to secure his expected role in the sex/gender system by taking a wife and producing heirs. It is a delicious irony, therefore, that this discussion of necessary subsumption pertains to a man, engrossed with the idea of kingship, and not to the indispensable woman upon whom he so heavily relies.

While there is some dispute as to when *Perkin* was actually written,² it is at least known that it was first published in 1634. Such a late date for the play is important because it accounts for an amorous tone contained in the play, having been written at a time when Protestant ideas of uniting love in marriage become prevalent. Indeed, Eugene M. Waith suggests that Katherine and Perkin's mutual love "is a prime ingredient in the paradoxical transformation of the impostor, Perkin, into a transcendent hero" (51) at the end of the play. Yet despite what it helps to accomplish, this romantic layer does not deny Katherine her agency, nor does it preclude the constant use of commodification terms with which this play is riddled, not only in regard to Katherine, but also Perkin himself, the counterfeit Duke. The importance of affection also appears, transmuted, in Ford's presentation of Katherine's relationship to her father Huntly. It is a sustained portrait of the complex father-daughter dynamic that explains how Katherine is so strong-willed and independent, while also empowered with an incipient understanding of the importance in choosing the right mate. Because it seems that Huntly influences not only her decision to marry Perkin but also to remain a widow at the play's end,³ it is worth giving pause to explore and understand their relationship. By aligning herself with Perkin, it may appear at first that Katherine does not follow the lessons of her father. Indeed, Huntly himself believes this because he tem-

porarily disowns her over this very issue. Ultimately, though, she heeds and agrees with his counsel to stand separate from the followers of both James IV and Henry VII, thereby sustaining her own center of power, while continuing to provide Perkin with the legitimacy he has needed from her throughout the play.

Katherine first appears in I.ii where Huntly has informed Daliell, a hopeful suitor to Katherine, that her decision to marry is one over which he has no control. If Daliell can win her hand on his own, then she may agree to accept his offer, but Huntly can only sponsor Daliell in his suit and not guarantee a favorable outcome for, as Huntly says to Katherine, “my care / Shall only counsel what it shall not force” (ll. 99-100).⁴ Huntly goes on to remind Katherine, though it sounds more as if he is reassuring himself, that her status as a member of the royal family of Scotland should not be forgotten in her selection process, which is why Daliell would make an excellent choice:

My Lord of Daliell, young in years, is old
 In honours, but nor eminent in titles
 Or in estate that may support or add to
 The expectation of thy fortunes.
 (ll. 115-18)

Huntly, then, points out the well-connected material aspects of Daliell — honors and eminent titles, with the added (though non-essential) bonus of his youth — that will enhance Katherine’s future inheritance and maintain her current, prominent societal status as well.

Huntly concludes by asking Katherine to remember him and his honor, and to take the freedom he is offering her, but ultimately, “Thou art thine own” (l. 124). Katherine thanks her father for the liberty he has granted in allowing her to make up her own mind. She recognizes her fortunate position, and assures him that by relinquishing control, he gains her vow that regardless of a man’s “birth, degrees of title, and advancement” (l. 135), she will “study” only those options that will cause Huntly not to “blush/In any course of mine to own me yours” (ll. 138-9). It is unexpected that Katherine retains such personal control over her future considering her royal connections, where arranged marriages are par for the course. What is not surprising, though, is that Huntly be concerned with her choice because he is inextricably tied to this trafficking process.

Gayle Rubin, in her ground-breaking anthropological essay “The Traffic in Women,” outlines a model of movement where “women move in one direction, cattle, shells or mats in the other” (191) direction, towards the household from which the woman has come. Rubin also defines a system she calls the “exchange of women” which specifies “that men have certain rights in their female kin, and

that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin. In this sense, the exchange of women is a profound perception of a system in which women do not have full rights to themselves” (177). This model works, therefore, only if a woman’s agency has been removed by a male kinsman, and, when applying this theory to *Perkin Warbeck*, it is clear Huntly has not done this. There does exist the movement of Katherine away from her father and his household towards her husband, which means that some sort of compensation — financial or otherwise — moves back towards Huntly. This explains why he supports Daliell, whose titles, estates, and old money will enhance Huntly’s standing in the community and benefit Katherine as well. However, no exchange of Katherine exists because Huntly, though still participating in the sex/gender system, leaves the choice of husband to Katherine, thereby preserving her agency and transgressing the expected boundaries between a father’s role and his daughter’s acquiescence. Huntly’s promotion in society can come about only through Katherine’s personal choice and decisions.

As a princess, Katherine will choose carefully, and because she will “study” every candidate, Huntly need not fear that she will yield “to a common servile rage / Of female wantonness” (ll. 111-2). Katherine has made it clear in her noncommittal response to Daliell’s offer that retaining and enhancing her own status is a consideration she shares with her father. To Daliell, she says that “I value mine own worth at higher rate / Cause you are pleased to prize it” (ll. 147-8), and that when the time comes to exchange vows,

I shall desire
No surer credit of a match with virtue
Than such as lives in you.
(ll. 163-5)

With a joyous “O Kate, thou art mine own!” (l. 174), Huntly shows how pleased he is with his daughter’s carefully contrived answer because it does not close the door on a future deal with Daliell. Also, Katherine makes known her political and financial acumen because she hopes to acquire as good a match or better than Daliell. Huntly can rest assured, then, that Katherine has been paying very close attention to his lectures on profiting from a strong and carefully considered investment. With these prerequisites in mind, it is no wonder that Katherine settles upon Perkin as a worthy mate.

Perkin first appears in II.i, appealing to James IV for help in his fight to wrest the throne of England away from Henry VII. Claiming to be Richard, Duke of York, nephew to Margaret of Burgundy and son of Edward IV, Perkin employs the royal “we” from the outset, and his eloquent manners and absolute, unwaver-

ing conviction in the rightfulness of his suit wins James over immediately, who believes, "He must be more than subject who can utter / The language of a king, and such is thine" (ll. 103-4). Requiring no further proof of true identity, James agrees to supply Perkin with troops, and welcomes this "Cousin of York" to his court. Such solid, royal approval is the first endorsement of legitimacy Perkin receives, and it explains Katherine's immediate confidence that Perkin is the type of mate she is seeking because he fits the requirements of the position: good connections, solid family background, possession of land and titles, member of the British royal family, potential for advancement, and is approved of by James. All of these factors point toward a strong return on Katherine's investment in a man whose promise exceeds any potential gain a merger with Daliell has to offer.

Unfortunately, Katherine's choice of mate does not please Huntly because he belongs to the small percentage of men who do not believe Perkin to be the Duke of York. In II.iii, Huntly makes known his fears and unhappiness to James, but by the time Huntly prophetically announces the ruin that will come upon Scotland from such a match — "Some of thy subjects' hearts, / King James, will bleed for this!" (ll. 66-7) — the courting has already begun off-stage. He is seemingly too late to stop either the marriage or the war that will ensue, but he does not actively attempt to halt the proceedings. Huntly may be unhappy but his loyalty to James and his own desire to honor his promise to Katherine of not imposing upon her decisions preclude his interfering. Huntly believes her behavior is fiscally imprudent, which explains why his words of sorrow are bound up in commodity terms because if Katherine has thrown away her holdings on a risky investment, then he too will feel the effects. Now with Daliell, who is equally distraught over her nuptials, Huntly mourns "what a bankrupt am I made / Of a full stock of blessings" (III.ii.72-73).

James, on the other hand, is overjoyed with the match, chides Huntly for his reservations, and replaces Huntly in his role as father of the bride. It is from James' hand, not Huntly's, that Perkin accepts Katherine as his bride.⁵ This further alters Rubin's trafficking diagram, for now Perkin is in motion, not Katherine. Rubin explains that men too are susceptible to being trafficked, but as anything other than simply as men, which differentiates their exchange rate from women who, according to Rubin, "are transacted as slaves, serfs, and prostitutes, but also simply as women" (176). That is, Perkin moves away from the endorsement and legitimizing backing of James and towards the independent security provided by Katherine, who happily takes on Perkin's debts of legitimacy previously held by James. What moves in the direction towards James, as Perkin later describes, is the promise of a peaceful future with

James and Richard, being in effect
One person, [who] shall unite and rule one people
Divisible in titles only.
(III.ii.106-8)

The result is that Perkin, not regarded simply as a man, is invested with James' hopes for gaining a strong ally and enjoying an amicable relationship with the future King of England. Perkin secures a new source to draw upon establishing his legitimacy, as he is about to marry a princess whose socio-economic standing will benefit his own. Further, with Huntly no longer relevant in the proceedings, Katherine retains and strengthens her agency because anything of hers that may move away from Perkin toward James, now the father figure, would leave him again as it would rejoin Perkin who is currently moving towards her, thus again returning to her possession. It is a complicated process, but it effects no change in Katherine and her solvency.

What does affect this contract is that Katherine and Perkin actually love one another. However, until their heartfelt rapprochement at the end of the play, a moving scene that showcases their affections, the newlyweds spend little time alone together. Further, most of the wooing and even the marriage takes place off-stage. When Katherine leaves in II.i to entertain the Duke, she announces her plan to concern herself in Perkin's cause. She next appears in II.iii, entering hand in hand with Perkin, much to her father's dismay. Such a swift courtship may be the result of true love, but it also suggests that Katherine's scheme worked, tender affection and amorous notions notwithstanding. Their mutual love is therefore marginalized, and is consistently couched in or inextricably tied to terms of material gains. This layer of romance, then, does not hide the fact that this union is still one of business, as relegating any non-financial aspects to off-stage makes clear. For example, Perkin says to Katherine:

Acknowledge me but sovereign of this kingdom,
Your heart, fair princess, and the hand of providence
Shall crown you queen of me and my best fortunes.
(II. 81-3)

If she agrees, Katherine will become queen both of him and his heart, but also his "best fortunes." Perkin feels the need to mention, in what is supposed to be a loving moment, what besides himself Katherine will acquire in accepting his offer. Moreover, even though they have just been joined in holy matrimony, Perkin will leave the next day to wage war against Henry, whom he describes ironically as "the counterfeit." While clearly love is a part of their relationship, Perkin and Katherine's outpouring of emotions are always enjoined with financial references.

Katherine sets this commodification tone after Perkin reveals his regret that tomorrow he will have to “put on steel, and trace the paths which lead / Through various hazards to a careful throne” (ll. 145-6). She wishes she could join him in the battle, as “there’s small fortune / In staying here behind” (ll. 147-8). In other words, Katherine would prefer to be with him, watching over her investment, rather than remain in Scotland where she no longer has ties because her future now lies with (and in) Perkin. His response to her pointed reminder of what he owes her is an amalgamation of several emotions and is one of several moments in the play where Perkin stresses “both his need for and his reverence of her” (Howard 274). The speech begins in lofty tones, assuring Katherine that the rightfulness of his claim will protect him, but should he die nobly fighting to usurp a fraud, her name will be the last word he utters. Perkin then abruptly reins himself in with “But these are chimes for funerals,” and taking his cue from Katherine’s speech, dedicates his vision of glory to her:

my business
 Attends on fortune of a sprightlier triumph;
 For love and majesty are reconciled
 And vow to crown thee Empress of the West.
 (ll. 159-62)⁶

Perkin acknowledges that Katherine, the legitimizing backer in his “business,” will accordingly receive her due, but his penchant for hyperbole comes out as he re-names her “Empress of the West.” He also does not want to pass up an opportunity to mention the rightfulness of his claim and that “love and majesty” are mutually joined in his quest.

Katherine thanks Perkin for his “noble language” but again reminds him that she has nothing now but herself and her heart because Perkin is a living, leaving holder of her material wealth. She wants him to promise that should they get through this, “no adventure / May sever us in tasting any fortune” (ll. 176-77) in the future. Always overly confident, Perkin vows that “our greatness” will insure a victory, thus again pointing to both the equality Katherine enjoys in their relationship, as well as the active, necessary role her station in life has afforded him. Unfortunately, despite painting such a rosy future for the two of them, Perkin the counterfeit will soon fail in his social-climbing efforts, leaving Katherine, who is “a barometer of authenticity” (Anderson 184) throughout this play, to make her own way by exercising her legitimacy to buoy a new subject: herself.

It is unfortunate for Katherine, but Perkin’s fall from grace is swift. Yet James, who deftly negotiates the proceedings, makes sure nothing will reflect poorly upon Katherine simply because of her husband. By III.iv, James finally questions the

veracity of Perkin's claims and sounds the retreat in the war, while Perkin himself no longer resembles royalty as he slips out of using the royal "we" and begins to refer to himself in first person singular. It is a dark moment, succinctly summarized in Crawford's observation that the Duke is now "effeminately dolent,"⁷ and even Perkin's most ardent supporter Frion suggests that Perkin only "appears" to be a Duke. Abandoned by James and questioned by his own followers, Perkin is again separated from any support network — James pointedly no longer calls him into council — and he can take refuge only under Katherine's ægis. But James, though admitting that he was taken in by Perkin's seemingly royal speech acts and confident veneer, takes extreme care when deciding Perkin's future. Because Perkin, married to a Scottish princess, now has a "mixture with our blood" (IV.iii.44), James will not execute him but

only I will dismiss him
From my protection, throughout my dominions
In safety, but not ever to return.
(ll. 46-8)

Katherine's royal connections, then, spare Perkin from death either at the hands of Scottish or British troops, and preclude James from turning him over to Henry. Further, James borrows from Katherine's example of investing in a mate by entering into an agreement to marry Margaret, the daughter of Henry VII. By trafficking in her, James is provided with a legitimate tie to the British throne — which will result historically in their great-grandson, James VI, ascending the throne to become James I in 1603⁸ — and this latest marriage replaces Perkin with Henry as the person with whom James will attempt to rule harmoniously. Perkin is entirely displaced and effeminately marginalized from consideration. Such savvy politicking is a variation on the very tactics Katherine herself has employed throughout the play, and because his new legitimizing acquisition has the ability to pay off in such large dividends, even James cannot believe his good fortune:

a marriage
With English Margaret, a free release
From restitution for the late affronts!
Cessation from hostility! And all
For Warbeck not delivered, but dismissed!
(ll. 56-60)

Perkin accepts the conditions of being exiled, and even in such a dark hour does not recant his story. He magnanimously thanks James for all that he has done on his behalf, asking only that he may be allowed to bring his wife. Before James can answer him, Katherine provides her own response:

I am your wife;
 No human power can or shall divorce
 My faith from duty.
 (ll. 101-3)

James concurs, adding only that he will provide the couple with “furniture becoming *her* high birth / And unsuspected constancy” (ll. 106-7, emphasis mine), and out of deference to Katherine’s still solid societal standing, they “will part good friends” (l. 108).

Katherine herself is unconcerned about the turn of events not only because she is reunited with Perkin, but also because her station in life has prepared her to deal with such situations: “My fortunes, sir, have armed me to encounter / What chance soe’er they meet with” (ll. 127-8). Knowing that he will be losing his daughter for good, Huntly relents in his censure and shows up to say good-bye, wishing her the best. Even Daliell, her erstwhile suitor, arrives to “wait on all / Your fortunes in my person” (ll. 166-7), and Perkin thanks him and accepts “this tender of your love” (l. 170) towards Katherine. Now devalued, Perkin will suffer for his unsuccessful attempts at social climbing, and even Katherine temporarily stumbles into unfortunate circumstances, as the final act of *Perkin Warbeck* begins with Katherine finding her way through the unfamiliar and hostile land of England with only her attendant Jane and another servant in tow. Because Perkin’s fortunes change for the worse after he shifts his alignment from James to Katherine, it is tempting to suggest that she is the cause, and had Perkin remained under the protection of a royal man rather than trafficking in a royal woman, perhaps he would not face execution at Henry’s hands. However, Perkin’s own missteps and obvious military incompetence detailed in IV.ii create his downfall; Katherine’s ægis of power does not extend to cover the battlefield. Yet though her royal standing is unsuccessful in sparing his life, it does effect a change of heart in James, Daliell, and most importantly, Katherine’s personal patriarch, her father Huntly: all show the defeated Perkin respect because he is married to Katherine, and her worth enables her to remain almost unaffected by what Perkin’s own actions have brought about.

Despite being captured in Henry’s court, Perkin does not retract his claims of being the Duke of York, and even continues to employ the royal “we” in front of Henry. Henry finds all of this amusing, commending Perkin for his acting abilities, and not to be outdone in self-descriptions of plurality, assures his followers that “we shall teach the lad another language” (l. 132), presumably one, according to Judith H. Anderson, that will “correspond to a counterfeit’s real worthlessness and hence to truth” (176). That is, Henry hopes to break Perkin’s will and get

him to admit he is what Henry sardonically refers to as the “counterfeit King Perkin” (l. 1). Further, Henry’s self-assured conduct and tyrannical treatment of both Perkin and Katherine throughout V.ii confirm that Perkin is losing ground. However, it also reveals that Henry misjudges Katherine’s constancy towards her husband and underestimates just how much power she is in a position to wield. Regardless, Henry dictates the events throughout this scene, beginning with deliberately keeping the couple separated both by making sure Perkin is escorted off stage before Katherine appears dressed in what the stage direction says is “her richest attire” (315), and also by meeting Katherine’s attempts to extract news from him with pronouncements of her beauty and the glorious life she will eventually have while living in his court. Katherine’s response to Henry’s barrage of compliments is trenchant: “O sir, I have a husband” (l. 153). Unfortunately, if Katherine means by this statement to stop Henry from making any more suggestive remarks and decisive plans about her future, it backfires. Instead, he continues not to recognize her autonomy by saying that all roads in her future will go through him because he will replace and act the part of every male in her life, “we’ll prove your father, husband, friend and servant” (l. 154).⁹ All of Henry’s subtle and not so subtle remarks throughout this scene serve to show Katherine how powerless she is: offering her money implies that her weakened assets have left her unable to refuse his assistance, embracing Daliell is meant to suggest that she has lost his independent protection, and continuing to refer only to her outward appearance acts as confirmation that Henry’s insistence that she live in England is not an innocent gesture. Compounding these overt machinations is Katherine’s continued ignorance on the status and condition of Perkin. It is not surprising, then, that she experiences a rare breakdown in a moment of feeling helpless: “cruel misery / Of fate, what rests to hope for?” (ll. 169-70).

With this cry, Katherine acknowledges her difficult situation and, though her tone is woeful, she still does not agree to Henry’s plans for her, nor does she concede the match. This is an important point because her continued resistance is a stance Henry does not recognize; he believes he has thoroughly outmaneuvered her. Pleased with his subjugated construct of Katherine, Henry smugly concludes by telling her it will all be over soon, and with his proposed arrangement he will provide her with something he incorrectly assumes she is looking for: “peace and Huntly’s blessing” (l. 171). Because of his negotiations with Scotland, Henry is probably aware that Perkin has lost all of his royal backing and that many in James’ court are not unhappy with his fall from grace. With her appearance in England escorted only by a paltry retinue, Henry assumes Perkin’s loss of legitimacy extends to Katherine as well. This is why he deliberately refers to regaining Huntly’s

approval because he thinks that by orchestrating Katherine's separation from Perkin, which means by extension he has dissolved her marriage, he has wrested control over Katherine away from Perkin to return to her father. Henry, though, is clearly unaware that Huntly has abdicated playing that role and is not involved in such trafficking, and also that it has been Katherine all along who has actively provided Perkin with his elevated societal position and is the one responsible for any influence he has wielded. Because she enjoys this independence, Katherine can and will use her marital status to buoy Perkin one last time before his execution and retake control of her own future.

The final scene begins with Perkin being placed in the stocks, a posture of public humiliation, and given the opportunity to recant again his claims to being royalty. As Joseph Candido states, Perkin's refusal to confess leaves little doubt "that Perkin is a man of 'spirit,'" and that "his love for Katherine, his utter self-absorption in the *idea* of kingship, and even his steadfast courage in maintaining the fiction all attest to the fact without question" (308). Like his wife, Perkin strives to remain independent to the end. Katherine soon appears — still dressed "in her richest attire" — and the couple is finally reunited, with Katherine immediately addressing Perkin as "O my loved lord!" (V.iii. 82). By pointedly referring to Perkin as a lord and for not distancing herself as other spectators expect her to, Katherine continues to lend credibility to Perkin's story and invest the proceedings with tragic dignity, for her words are, as Michael Cameron Andrews importantly notes, "addressed to Warbeck in the presence of men wholly committed to Henry," and that they "assert the primacy of the intimate and personal; all else — even the dynastic — is of lesser consequence" (90). Perkin understands the importance of her presence and the symbolism of faith and truth it brings to bear upon him and his words, and he does not allow her act on his behalf to go unnoticed:

Great miracle of constancy! My miseries
 Were never bankrupt of their confidence
 In worst afflictions, till this now, I feel them.
 (ll. 88-90)

As Rowland Wymer describes it, "Katherine's fidelity represents Perkin's one great moral victory over Henry, whose own wife is never seen and whose closest friend betrayed him" (152). Henry may have defeated Perkin, then, but his victory will not be an absolute triumph because Katherine will not relinquish the role of staunch, unwavering supporter despite Perkin's restricted, humiliated, and subjugated position.

Katherine's refusal to leave Perkin causes much consternation among the men present. Oxford even goes so far as to imply she has forgotten that she is a mem-

ber of the royal family, and should therefore not align herself with Perkin, that “impudent impostor” (l. 111). Such disapproval only strengthens Katherine’s resolve to lend support to Perkin, and in her response to Oxford, she deliberately says, “You abuse us” (l. 111), thus linking herself to Perkin with words as well as gestures. Katherine has no reason not to be so constant because regardless of Perkin’s claims on the British throne and any treasonous acts he may have committed, there is one name he is called that is not false, one that is more important and most meaningful to her, that of husband: “For when the holy churchman joined our hands / Our vows were real then” (ll. 112-3). By personalizing Oxford’s reference to Perkin’s dynastic claims and instead applying it to their marriage, Katherine — unquestioned as his legal wife — can honorably and legitimately stay by Perkin’s side without concern of being reprimanded. Moreover, “through her constancy and duty, Katherine has validated the reality of the words she once vowed” (Anderson 189) and having already verbally connected herself with Perkin, such speech acts continue to buoy Perkin. Grateful for this gesture, Perkin couches their marriage in terms of a microcosmic monarchy, so that “Even when I fell, I stood enthroned a monarch / Of one chaste wife’s troth, pure and uncorrupted” (ll. 125-6). According to Alexander Leggatt, because both Katherine and Perkin inscribe their marriage with this monarchical tableau, the action of the play moves “from a literal kingship that seems, increasingly, a dead idea, to the sort of figurative kingship, the royalty of nature, that any person with integrity can claim” (136). Ellen Ryan Dubinski concurs, and says “that the kingship with which Ford concerns himself in this other kind of chronicle is quite obviously another kind of kingliness — linked not to birth or position — but to the individual himself” (239). In the end, then, Perkin may not have been a literal king, but Katherine’s conduct for him and towards him made him feel like one after all.¹⁰

Such outpourings of genuine emotions still do not silence Oxford, who again reminds Katherine that as a lady she should not be behaving this way. Having tried previously and failed in his endeavor, Oxford adopts a new tactic — though he will eventually be proven wrong — and this time mentions that her father, “the lord ambassador” (l. 132), would be ashamed of her conduct. As before, Oxford’s attempts to quiet Katherine succeed only in prompting her to become more resolute, and she now does something quite clever. Willfully misinterpreting Oxford’s objections, Katherine abruptly changes the tone of her conversation and agrees with the angered Oxford, though surely this was not what he was suggesting she do, and decides she should be “more peremptory in my duty” (l. 138). With that, Katherine’s tone becomes juridical, and she assumes the role of primary provider

who wants to assess and rebuild the solvency of her financial picture; she asks Perkin for a will:

Impute it not unto immodesty
That I presume to press you to a legacy,
Before we part for ever.
(ll. 139-41)

Perkin unhesitatingly complies, knowing that it hardly matters both because he is about to be executed, and also because she is the person who shared her assets, her societal connections, and her titles when he had none to bring with him into the marriage. Therefore, he bequeaths to her the one possession he has to offer: his heart, which is “the rich remains of all my fortunes” (l. 142). Katherine accepts it, and so as to make sure her agency remains strong and independent, she further astonishes the gathering crowd by vowing “to die a faithful widow to thy bed / Not to be forced or won. O never, never!” (ll. 151-2). By removing herself from the category of eligible female, Katherine has created for herself an independent future, where she can live in the slippery domain of widowhood,¹¹ free of any threat to her potency, preserving her center of power and retaining the final word on any personal decision that will need to be made. Not surprisingly, Rubin does not address the issue of widows because no trafficking occurs: the system of power conferred on men and by men through the medium of women has no place in a socially constructed gender status that by its very definition is independent from men. Therefore Katherine, who was not subjugated while married because she was not trafficked, emerges a triumphant widow who is still connected to the sex/gender system, but in an autonomously threatening role.

Ford has been criticized for making Katherine a widow, when her historical prototype went on to acquire (and bury) three more husbands.¹² However, like Marlowe and Shakespeare, Ford’s precursors in the chronicle history genre, he took from his sources what he could use, what would create good drama, and embellished or crafted fictive outcomes for the rest. With this emendation, Ford creates a space in which Katherine may be reconciled with her father by heeding his advice to her and wishes for her, all without compromising her agency. It is one of the few times in the play that Ford departs from his sources — another notable moment being his omission of Perkin’s public confession before being executed — and both serve to strengthen Katherine’s case. As Thelma N. Greenfield notes, Katherine is “the only character of royal connection who manages to elude the charge of counterfeit” (13). Throughout the play, Katherine “undergoes successfully the same challenge to personal worth and the same challenge to capacity for noble deeds as do her male counterparts” (Greenfield 13), and to emphasize her

success in this endeavor, Ford deliberately makes Katherine a solitary figure of support and loyalty to the end, and it is not an unexpected result considering her previous conversations with her father.

In I.ii, when Huntly first announces that Katherine is solely responsible for selecting her own mate, he suggests that she choose carefully because “thou canst but make one choice; the ties of marriage / Are tenures not at will but during life” (ll. 101-2). That is, Huntly cautions Katherine that she will get married only once in life, so when at the play’s end she announces her intentions to stay a widow, Katherine is complying with her father’s ideas on this subject. This explains why, when Huntly arrives finally towards the end of V.iii, that he is not outraged by either the behavior of his daughter as Oxford thought he would be, or by her decision to live as a widow. Instead, Huntly, despite his displeasure with her choice in mate, nevertheless understands her current actions and acknowledges her right to “enjoy thy duty to a husband freely” (l. 161). Huntly continues to prove Oxford wrong by saying he is also proud that she has taken up such a strong and unexpected position, and is further delighted to bear witness upon such conduct that reflects positively upon him and the lessons of proper mate selection that Katherine has followed:

I glory in thy constancy;
And must not say I wish that I had missed
Some partage in these trials of a patience.
(ll. 162-4)

His relationship with Katherine restored, Huntly forgives her and in so doing, extends an important gesture of support by publicly condoning her actions to maintain an independent power base; he even imparts “a farewell / Of manly pity” (l. 169) to Perkin.

Admittedly, Katherine has suffered in the play because of her independent choice of mate. Howard is not surprised by this because “disasters are shown [on the Renaissance stage] to follow from women’s exercise of judgement in these matters, or it becomes apparent that women are granted this freedom only so long as they exercise it in a way patriarchal authority finds acceptable” (267). In Howard’s model, therefore, Katherine’s agency is removed so that she is doomed if she does not select her own husband, and is doomed if she does. Yet Katherine *did* exercise her judgment both in a way that patriarchal authority — in the figure of James IV and his court — initially found acceptable, and also that satisfied her own requirements for the role; the two need not be mutually exclusive. Further, the play does not end disastrously for Katherine nor for Henry and James. Only Perkin suffers because Katherine can no longer stave off his execution as she em-

braces her newly fashioned role of widow. Rather than ending what has all along been an “ill-fated exercise of female independence” (Howard 268), the play concludes with Katherine having successfully secured a will from her beloved husband, acquired a separate peace with her reconciled father, and created a space in which to live the life she wants to lead. Her exemplary comportment, culminating in what Verna Ann Foster calls “her proud self-abasement” in the face of her husband’s humiliated imprisonment, shows that it is Katherine “who is in all ways the stronger and more discriminating character” (149) throughout the play. It is no wonder, therefore, that Ford’s unblemished and noble portrait of dignity has earned the distinction, according to Marion Lomax, as ranking “among the most dramatically powerful female characters on the post-Shakespearean stage” (viii).

When explaining her advocacy for the term “sex/gender” in favor of its alternative “patriarchy,” Rubin says, “Patriarchy is a specific form of male dominance, and the use of the term ought to be confined to the Old Testament-type pastoral nomads from whom the term comes, or groups like them” (168). While not suggesting that the term “traffic in women” should be confined to similarly restrictive situations, I am instead arguing for a re-investment of the concept. When that occurs, it is revealed how female characters like Katherine Gordon remain involved in the trafficking process, but to their own advantage. That is, they still participate in the male-dominated sex/gender system, but invert the subjugation and oppression expected to result when they become wives because, as it turns out, their husbands rely on them and the legitimacy their stations in life afford the men. So although I reach a different conclusion than Rubin, her theories can be inscribed as empowering Katherine during the nuptial process, rather than contributing to a loss of her agency. This is Ford’s most important accomplishment: creating a “good” female character who affords legitimacy while retaining an individual and solvent center of power. That Ford constructed Katherine owning such traits is a testament to his shrewd understanding of the sex/gender system in which he lived, and it is his acknowledgment of the indispensable role performed by noble women to maintain that system. The notion of trafficking — the word itself coming into its own during the Renaissance — is a prevalent one but it need not signal subjugation. Instead it can be fashioned into an opportunity for a woman to create a niche in society, a pursuit in which Katherine engages throughout *Perkin Warbeck*. Katherine is, ultimately, a literary example of female strength, exemplifying the ability to survive within a system that may subsume women — as Ford’s own experience with a sex/gender system subsumed both sexes — but does not concurrently consume them. ❀

Notes

¹ This term, an alternative to the monolithic “patriarchal system,” comes from Gayle Rubin and her groundbreaking essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex.” Rubin explains that “patriarchy” is an insufficient label as opposed to a sex/gender system that maintains “a distinction between the human capacity and necessity to create a sexual world, and the empirically oppressive ways in which sexual worlds have been organized. Patriarchy subsumes both meanings into the same term. Sex/gender system, on the other hand, is a neutral term which refers to the domain and indicates that oppression is not inevitable in that domain, but is the product of the specific social relations which organize it” (168).

² In his book *Theatres of Greatness: A Revisionary View of Ford’s Perkin Warbeck*, Dale B.J. Randall argues that Ford wrote this play in the 1620s, making it a late Jacobean play, rather than an early Caroline production. Lisa Hopkins does not necessarily disagree, and in her brilliant book *John Ford’s Political Theatre* claims “the play seems to be offering subtle criticisms of Charles I” (172). Further, Hopkins does not find it surprising that Ford chose to write about this episode in English history because “almost every major character in *Perkin Warbeck* is in fact a direct ancestor of a Ford dedicatee or of a member of their family” (40), and the dedicatees were all opposed to Charles I.

³ See Susannah Brietz Monta, “Marital Discourse and Political Discord: Reconsidering *Perkin Warbeck*.” Monta reads Katherine as a disruptive figure by “legitimizing a pretender in the realm of domesticity despite his condemnation in the political world” (1), but inscribes Katherine’s achievements in a submissive arena by suggesting she was following her obsequious wifely duties as described in the marriage manuals of Ford’s day.

⁴ John Ford, *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore and Other Plays*, ed. Marion Lomax. All further quotations of this play will refer to this Oxford, 1995 edition.

⁵ Ira Clark contends that James’ “desire that Katherine marry Warbeck instead of her father’s choice countermands her filial obedience” (79). Such a reading not only removes from Katherine the power to choose her mate, but also inscribes Huntly with a level of control he does not possess. As I have illustrated, Huntly can interfere only insofar as to decry her selection, and may not impose his will.

⁶ This hyperbolic finale borrows from Tamburlaine’s promise to make Zenocrate “empress of the world” (III.iii.125). For more examples of how Ford borrowed from Marlowe, see Mark Thornton Burnett, “Marlovian Echoes in Ford’s *Perkin Warbeck*.”

⁷ Jean Howard argues that with this emasculating description of the impostor, Ford is both feminizing Perkin as well as the history genre itself, and therefore “shows how a patriarchal, absolutist culture unthinks itself” (264).

⁸ Historically, the confusing royal ancestry of James VI and I is remarkable, whereby Margaret is not only his maternal grandmother but his paternal grandmother as well. As Randall succinctly explains, Margaret “became the grandmother of Mary Queen of Scots, who was the mother of James VI and I; and by her second marriage Margaret became the grandmother of James’s father, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, who on his father’s side was descended from a junior branch of the royal Stuarts and could make a claim to the Scottish throne that was nearly as good as Mary’s own. . . . When James VI of Scotland came down into England, he did, indeed, bring an extraordinary confluence of lines” (20-22).

⁹ It is because of his tyrannical posturing in matters both public and private that Henry is never fully vindicated by the play’s end, despite being the only major character with the perspicacity to suspect Perkin of lying from the beginning. Further, several scholars have made the point that while the word “counterfeit” is ascribed to Perkin throughout the play, Henry’s climb to the throne is not free from also being characterized as such. See Leggatt, Greenfield, and Howard.

¹⁰ Leggatt goes on to suggest that unlike Shakespeare, who has little interest in exploring the private sphere, Ford more fully develops it because *Perkin Warbeck* was written at an historical time when “it may no longer be possible to be unquestioned king of England, but it is possible to be king in one’s own mind” (137). Indeed, Shakespeare’s foray into investing a private moment with importance — Henry V’s wooing of Katharine for example — appears artificial and stagey when compared to Ford’s inward-looking portrait of Katherine and Perkin, written decades later.

¹¹ Rose notes how problematic it was for the dominant culture to absorb and define widowhood because “an independent woman running her own household presented a contradiction to English patriarchal ideology” (165). Theodora A. Jankowski concurs, and in *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* suggests that widows were perceived as a threat to the social order (35-6).

¹² In an interesting historical footnote, Michael Van Cleave Alexander explains in his book *The First of the Tudors: A Study of Henry VII and His Reign* that the real Katherine “resumed her maiden name shortly after her capture” (120) by Henry VII’s troops. However, over a decade passed before she married her second husband James; therefore Ford’s portrait of her as self-fashioning the role of widow is not misrepresentative.

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