

Open Ears, Appetite, and Adultery in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*

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AS THOMAS EDGAR NOTES IN *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights*, some women in the early modern period were able to “shift it well enough” (6); nevertheless, in law they were generally subject to their husbands and fathers and encouraged—at least by conduct book writers and preachers—to listen to these men as figures of male authority.¹ At the same time, women were warned to guard their ears and “stop” them from hearing “dishonestie” (Overbury c4), as it was feared, thanks to the traditional commentary on Eve’s role in the Fall, that women were more likely to be corrupted—and therefore to corrupt men—if they heard subversive or inappropriate ideas. These fears were most often expressed not as concerns over male speech but as unease about the female desire to listen, what Othello calls, in reference to Desdemona, her “greedy ear” (*Othello* 1.3.148), and appear connected to views of female sexuality. A number of critics,

1 For a sampling of authors who emphasize the need for women to listen to their husbands see Heinrich Bullinger lxxv; Robert Cleaver 101, 224–26; Stefano Guazzo D2^r; Thomas Gataker 14–15; William Gouge 282; William Whately 40–41. Writers who discuss the need for children to listen to their parents include Richard Brathwait, *The English Gentlewoman*, 183; Nicholas Breton D^r; Peter de la Primaudaye 539, in addition to Cleaver 255 and Gouge 133, 437.

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including Peter Stallybrass, Lynda Boose, and Douglas Bruster, discuss the link between the mouth and the vagina and the association between speech and sexual licentiousness in the period, and Linda Woodbridge notes the long-time connection between the ear and the vagina (Woodbridge 55). However, the link between all three orifices, the ear, mouth, and vagina, is often overlooked because of the current tendency to view ears as passive, ever-open orifices (Kilgour 131). In contrast, in the early modern period, ears, like mouths and vaginas, were regarded not only as passive openings through which the body could be penetrated, but also as sites through which desire could be expressed. I therefore wish to explore how these three orifices were constructed as sites of female desire and how this construction is revealed through the character of Anne Frankford in Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*.

Not only are the ear and mouth connected as one hears the speech the other produces, but they are also linked through the analogy of speech to food, an association common in the early modern period.² The idea of speech as “nourishment of the soule” (Primaudaye 126) was most fruitful for Protestant preachers who clearly had a vested interest in encouraging people to take in and digest the spoken word, at least when they were preaching.³ According to these preachers, an open ear is necessary for both faith and obedience and those who exhibit a closed ear, who refuse to listen to God's word (or to God's earthly representatives), are ungodly. Protestant and Catholic writers alike revered the Virgin Mary as the ideal listener because she attended to and believed what she heard, bearing God's son (the Word made flesh) as a result (Hassel 54–55, 69–72). They insisted that this type of hearing was necessary for faithful, “fruitful” obedience. In contrast, Eve was deemed the epitome of an unfruitful hearer not only because she failed to maintain belief in God's word, accepting what the serpent said over God's earlier directive, but also because her act of listening brought the antithesis of fruitfulness—death—into the world.

While Protestant ministers encouraged their congregations (and readers) to hunger for God's word and to incorporate it into their bodies so that they, like the Virgin Mary, might be transformed, preachers were also

2 See Brathwait, *The English Gentleman* 89, and Primaudaye 126–29, for reference to speech as food; Brathwait, *Essaies upon the Five Senses* 6–7, for reference to the ear as a digestive organ; and Guichard-Joseph Duverney 70–71, for the anatomy of the ear described in terms of a mouth.

3 For examples of Protestant preachers who write of scripture and their sermons as food, see Daniel Burgess 10; Stephen Egerton 33; Richard Greenham 75; and Henry Smith 117.

aware of how other voices could interfere with digestion. As Eve discovered, what the devil and the world say is often more appealing than what God says. Robert Wilkinson writes, “The diuel calleth by temptation and yee yeelde vnto it, the worlde calleth and ye listen to it, the fleshe calleth and ye come to it, but the worship of God calleth and ye care not for it” (Bv^v). Such an ear, according to Richard Croke, is an “adulterous Eare” (Egerton A4^{r-v}).⁴ Moreover, he specifically associates these adulterous ears with transgressive female sexual desire, for they are known “as the Harlot is knowne, they are euer gadding to seeke their new Louers” (A5^r). Nonetheless, even as he suggests that these ears are too open to other voices, that they “will heare any but the voice of their owne Shepherds,” Croke paradoxically concludes that they are not open enough: They “neede to haue the word *Ephphata* [glossed as ‘be open’] pronounced vnto them as vnto the deafe man” (A5^{r-v}). By paying attention to the wrong voice, regardless of how that is defined, an ear is deemed to be both too open and too closed, both a “Harlot” and “vngodly.”

All who preferred listening to the seductions of the devil and the world risked being likened to an adulterous woman, but the association between aural and vaginal openness had particular consequences for women. Women who listened too well risked being accused of having excessive sexual desires. In addition, the analogy of speech to food suggests an underlying concern with consumption. While there has been little recent consideration of the mouth and ear as ingestive orifices,⁵ post-Reformation preachers were not the only early modern writers to construct them both as sites of consumption. Excess appetite for one was often glossed in terms of the other, and the female ear and mouth, in particular, had to be monitored. Eve’s first sin may have been of the ear when she listened to and believed the serpent, but her second sin was of the mouth when she ate the forbidden fruit. Such an interpretation of Eve’s transgression encouraged writers to conflate female aural and oral appetite and to

- 4 Croke lists five types of “not hearing eares.” The others are the “dull Eare” of one who is drowsy, the “stopped Eare” of the Recusant, the “preiudiciall or sinister Eare” of the sceptic, and the “nice or itching Eare” that desires new, pleasing speech, regardless of the content.
- 5 Introducing the topic of “diet and discourse” in a special edition of *Mosaic*, Evelyn J. Hinz fails to consider how both food and speech are incorporated into the body, focusing instead on their oral nature (xiii). In addition, critics who focus on Bakhtin’s idea of the grotesque body and its “excrescences” and “orifices” (Bakhtin 318) are more concerned with how the body exceeds its boundaries. While Bakhtin comments on the incorporation of the external through the mouth (317), he fails to consider the ear as a consuming orifice, and later critics have maintained this silence.

suggest that both would consume male wealth. In a passage that blurs the distinction between what is heard and what is eaten, Robert Cleaver notes that “daintinesse, or choisenesse in diet, is an enemie to frugalitie, a needlesse charge” (72). He then goes on to complain about those “whose talke is nothing but froath, their words vnsauerie, and bring no good to the hearer” (74). Food or speech that fails to nourish the consumer is deemed wasteful because of its very lack of sustenance.

The fear of excessive consumption by women also prompted conduct book writers to advocate restraining the female appetite for food, and not simply because of the cost of satisfying such an appetite. In 1581, William Lowth translated Barthélemy Batt’s recommendations that a young woman should eat only so much “as that shee may be alwayes an hungred” and that she should “not eate openly ... in the feastes and banquetes of her Parentes, lest shee see such meats as shee might desire and lust after” (75^v). Writing half a century later, Richard Brathwait counsels the same restraint because “*Luscious fare* is the fuell of euery inordinate concupiscence.” He tells his readers, “By restraint of this, you shall learne to moderate your desires” (*English Gentlewoman* 140). He suggests that indulging a woman’s appetite for good food will arouse other desires in her; by denying her food, she will learn to suppress those desires. Brathwait also connects consumption by the ear and mouth through metaphor. He calls those who participate in gossip “*Feminine Epicures* who surfet out their time in an vnwomanly excesse” (51); women who revel in overblown rhetoric are “Shee-Censors” who are “lesse than Women at their *worke*, yet at their *meat* (so vnconfined is their appetite) they are more than men” (75); and women who enjoy music are “sensuall *Curtezans*” (77). While Brathwait’s comparisons are clearly extreme, his complaints against “*Feminine Epicures*” and “Shee-Censors” make the familiar connection between aural and oral consumption, and his determination that such excessive desire is “unwomanly” and like that of “sensuall *Curtezans*” completes the triad by constructing aural and oral appetite in terms of sexual desire.

Preachers and conduct book writers might insist that aural openness was necessary for faith and obedience, but such openness was a potential problem for women because of its association with desire. Women may have been encouraged to imitate the Virgin Mary’s obedient “fruitful” listening, but they were more commonly criticized for emulating Eve and listening in response to their own whims. Moreover, listening like Eve implied that other female desires would be intensified as a result. After all, Eve’s desire for the forbidden fruit, so often glossed as sexual knowledge (Norris 338), was caused by listening to the serpent: “So the woman (seing

that the tre was good for meat, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, & a tre to be desired to get knowledge) toke of the frute thereof, and did eat” (Genesis 3:6). These writers could therefore claim that aural consumption fuelled an increasing oral appetite, and both were inextricably linked to sexual desire. Moreover, these desires were considered difficult to assuage. Despite being subject to male authority, Eve’s desires—and those of her female descendants—were not eliminated; they were simply suppressed. Hence, the insistence that the vagina and female ear and mouth be closely monitored, not so much because they could be invaded or penetrated but because they could disclose an insatiable appetite. In her discussion of orality and incorporation, Maggie Kilgour notes that eating, sexual intercourse, verbal communication, and reading are all acts of incorporation. She points out that it is fairly easy to monitor the intake of food; however, “the mental absorption of others—central to Renaissance ideals of self-fashioning ... —is much more difficult to determine and regulate.” She suggests that this “might be read as justification for policing the territory more closely for fear it be infiltrated” (10) and adds that the ears are peculiarly vulnerable to infiltration because they are permanently open (131).

The yoking of aural and sexual openness is apparent in a number of domestic tragedies of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in which a wife is persuaded by someone to engage in adultery. She becomes sexually open because she listens to speech she should not hear.⁶ Both plots of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* explore gendered definitions of honour, examining issues of generosity and debt, female chastity, and male amity and enmity, but I wish to focus particularly on the main plot of Wendoll and the Frankfords as it offers a complex presentation of the causes and effects of adultery and constructions of openness, particularly female openness and the link between aural, oral, and sexual appetite. A play that links eating with sexual activity (Bryan 9), *A Woman Killed with Kindness* offers no obvious motivation for Anne’s adultery, and this has led critics to argue that Anne is simply a typed character, a “cipher” (Bennett 49), an “ornament” for Frankford (Lieblein 190), or an “erring wom[a]n” (van Fossen xlvi), instantly recognizable to Heywood’s contemporaries, and that a discussion of her motivation is therefore “beside the point”

⁶ Viviana Comensoli notes that about twenty domestic tragedies were written between 1590 and 1610. Complete copies of only five of these plays now exist. Of these, three involve an adulterous wife who is won through some form of persuasion: *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham* (1591), *A Warning for Fair Women* (1599), and Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603).

(Harbage 205–06).⁷ While Anne does indeed err, as the play opens on her wedding day she is portrayed as the “perfect wife” (I.37), whose only desire is to please her husband (I.31–36).⁸ Her perfection, however, leads to trouble, for Wendoll claims that he falls in love with Anne because she is a “fair angel, chaste and wise” (VI.105) and that her very “perfections” prevent him from praying for divine assistance when he tries to quell his desire for her (9–11).⁹

Anne remains the perfect wife even when Frankford “extends his fateful invitation to Wendoll to “[b]e [his] companion” and tells his wife to “[u]se him with all thy loving’st courtesy” (IV.72, 80). Her reply clearly indicates that her courtesy toward her husband’s friend is determined by her role as wife: “As far as modesty may well extend, / It is my duty to receive your friend” (81–82). Following this affirmation of her duty to her husband and, therefore, to his friends, we do not see Anne again until she conveys the message from the absent Frankford that Wendoll is

To make bold in his absence and command
Even as himself were present in the house,
For you must keep his table, use his servants,
And be a present Frankford in his absence. (VI.75–78)

This message simply reiterates and extends Frankford’s earlier invitation to his friend. It also echoes the play’s emphasis on food and eating, particu-

7 Several critics remark on both the lack of affection shown between Anne and Frankford and Anne and Wendoll and the lack of obvious motive for Anne’s adultery. See Harbage 205–06; Keifer 87; McClintock 109; McLuskie 157; McQuade 233; and Panek 366–67.

8 All references to *A Woman Killed with Kindness* are to the New Mermaids edition, edited by Brian Scobie.

9 Despite the claim that Anne is not a fully realized character, various critics have insisted on explaining the link between the Anne of the first scene and the Anne seduced by Wendoll. The explanations are as varied as the critics. Some insist that the excessive praise of Anne in the first scene is a sure sign of her impending fall (Canuteson 129; Spacks 323); others note that the praise simply expresses the desire that Anne be an ideal wife, rather than the reality of her character, and that her later fall is a realization of the anxieties that underlie that desire (Moisan 177–78). Van Fossen suggests that her capitulation to Wendoll as a sign of her impulsiveness (xlvi), while David Cook argues that Anne’s experience with Wendoll is her “first encounter with passion” and that her reaction is a sign of her inexperience (357–58).

larly the link between sexual and oral appetite.¹⁰ The play, after all, begins with a marriage feast, and there are repeated scenes in which characters have just eaten or are about to eat. Against this background, Frankford insists that Wendoll eat, “use [his] table,” and even though Wendoll is initially reluctant, claiming, “O Lord, sir, I shall never deserve it!” (IV.65–66), by the time Anne relays Frankford’s message, the relationship between the two men has changed.

Immediately before Anne’s speech, Wendoll soliloquizes about how he has grown in Frankford’s affections. He notes that his host “cannot eat without [him]” and that he is “to [Frankford’s] body / As necessary as his digestion, / And equally do make him whole or sick” (VI.40–43). Thus, while Frankford initially offers to feed Wendoll, Wendoll now claims that he is the food Frankford needs, part of his friend’s very being.¹¹ Anne’s repetition of Frankford’s invitation simply confirms Wendoll’s view of himself as “a present Frankford.” In addition, immediately after the speech in which Wendoll reflects on his host’s dependence on him, Jenkin puns on the terms master and mistress, noting that as Wendoll is now his “new master” (53), Wendoll’s query about Jenkin’s mistress (Anne) must refer to Wendoll’s wife (57–61). It is little wonder then that Wendoll might regard Anne’s delivery of Frankford’s message as a sign that he is indeed to assume the duties of master of the house and to enjoy the conjugal rights of having Anne as “mistress.”

It is on hearing the invitation to be “a present Frankford” that Wendoll proclaims his love, a proclamation that leads to Anne hearing inappropriate speech through no fault of her own. She tries to stop him immediately upon hearing his declaration of love, an interruption indicated by his speech:

I love you—start not, speak not, answer not.

I love you—nay, let me speak the rest.

10 Margaret Bryan argues that Heywood uses eating and food to symbolize erotic love, particularly between Anne and Wendoll, and that Frankford’s invitation to Wendoll reveals his subconscious desire to be cuckolded. Nancy Gutierrez and Christopher Frey and Leonore Lieblein also discuss food in the play in the context of Anne’s refusal to eat and the potential resistance signified by this refusal.

11 Frey and Lieblein argue that this speech reveals how Wendoll’s relationship with Frankford “literalizes the consumption at the centre of the Frankford household” and how, even as Wendoll becomes part of Frankford, his “consumption of his friend’s hospitality deprives him of autonomy” (58).

Bid me to swear, and I will call to record
The host of heaven. (VI.106–09)

Anne then replies, “The host of heaven forbid / Wendoll should hatch such a disloyal thought” (109–10). Clearly she is of the opinion that he should not even think, never mind express these feelings, and, still thinking of her position as Frankford’s wife, she asks how Wendoll could “dishonour” her husband by speaking to her in such a manner (119–22).¹² Wendoll’s initial demand for Anne’s silence suggests that he expects her to object to his expressions of love. However, he then adds a contradictory and impossible command (given Frankford’s absence) that she “tell [her] husband” before outlining what might happen to him as a result of her speech:

Go, tell your husband; he will turn me off,
And I am then undone. I care not, I—
'Twas for your sake. Perchance in rage he'll kill me.
I care not—'twas for you. Say I incur
The general name of villain through the world,
Of traitor to my friend—I care not, I.
Beggary, shame, death, scandal, and reproach,
For you I'll hazard all—what care I?
For you I'll live, and in your love I'll die. (VI.130–38)

This speech is Anne’s undoing; even though she does not want to hear it, her very openness to it leaves her vulnerable to Wendoll’s persuasion (Wentworth 154). While Wendoll names consequences of a speech she cannot make, Anne accepts his construction of events as fact, and his suggestion of what will happen to him if she tells her husband “move[s] her] ... to passion and to pity” (VI.139).

Wendoll therefore succeeds in provoking a particular emotion in Anne despite her initial reluctance to hear him. Wayne Rebhorn notes that in

12 While I read Anne as emphasizing her role as Frankford’s wife here, van Fossen argues that her response to Wendoll is predicated on her husband’s relationship to him, not on her own emotions, and goes on to express apparent surprise that “[n]ot once does she indicate that she feels any loathing or even dislike for her seducer” (van Fossen xlviiii). Given Anne’s role as a “[p]liant and duteous” wife (I.41), who deems it her “duty to receive [her husband’s] friend” (IV.82), it would be inappropriate for her to express antipathy towards Wendoll. I suggest it is far more pertinent that she never expresses any desire for him.

the early modern period there were two methods considered effective in persuading listeners. One was rhetorical technique, and the other was for a speaker to feel and express the emotion desired in a listener (86–87). David Cook argues that Wendoll is “overmastered by his passions” and “woos Anne ... without finesse, with direct conviction and feeling” (357), but Wendoll is not so “overmastered” that he fails to speak in a highly structured and rhetorically controlled manner. His speech divides into four parts, each concluding with the repeating phrase “I care not,” which changes to “What care I?” in the final repetition. He draws on the rhetorical figures of epanalepsis and ploche with the repetition of “I” in “I care not, I,” and is a master of hyperbole as he declares the consequences of Anne’s imagined speech to be “[b]eggary, shame, death, scandal, and reproach—,” a climax to the parison of his final rhyming couplet in which he declares he will “hazard all” for Anne, live for her, and die in her love. It is no wonder that Anne is moved by such speech.

In addition, even as listeners were believed to exercise free will when they assented to a speaker’s words, they were also thought to have “no choice but to do so, being compelled by the speaker’s rhetorical prowess” (Rebhorn 93). Still, regardless of Anne’s inability to stop Wendoll speaking and to avoid being “enslaved” by his rhetorical skill, she would be labelled a “credulous Creature” by writers such as Brathwait, who warns women to beware of men “who can tip their glozing tongues with Rhetoricall protests ... for the purchase of an vnlawfull pleasure” (*English Gentlewoman* 143). As a result, despite her lack of aural and sexual appetite, other characters, even those somewhat sympathetic to her, compare her to Eve seduced by Satan. She may show little aural appetite for what she hears, but her ear is still the “devil’s gateway” (Tertullian quoted in Norris 196).¹³ That Anne also sees herself as Eve is apparent, not only in her remark that Wendoll’s “tongue ... hath enchanted [her]” (vi.158–59) but also in her awareness that her “soul is wandering and hath lost her way” and that she is now caught in a “maze” which is a “labyrinth of sin” (150, 159–60).¹⁴

When Frankford learns about his wife’s adultery from Nick, his faithful servant, he is initially angry at Nick and incredulous of what he hears, demanding evidence and declaring, “Till I know all, I’ll nothing seem to

13 As he kisses her, Wendoll describes Anne’s acquiescence is “[t]he path of pleasure, and the gate to bliss” (vi.161). He is likened to Satan by several characters, including Anne herself (vi.178; XVI.109), though Frankford sees Wendoll as Judas and himself as Christ (VIII.106–07; XIII.76–78).

14 Anne’s “labyrinth” echoes Jane Anger’s admonition to women that “[a]t the end of mens faire promises there is a Laberinth” (C4^v).

know" (VIII.115). However, in the scene that follows, it is plain that the report of his friend's betrayal and his wife's infidelity, as yet unproven, has already infected him.¹⁵ The talk is ostensibly about the card game, but Frankford repeatedly interprets Anne and Wendoll's speech as having a sexual reference. This aural "proof" prompts Frankford to set his trap and, despite Anne's objections and her pleas that he at least take Wendoll with him, her husband takes his leave and invites his friend to "use / The very ripest pleasure of my house" (XI.63–64).¹⁶ His meaning, given his own penchant for hearing sexual innuendo in the language of others, appears unmistakable, and Wendoll welcomes his new position, noting, "I am husband now in Master Frankford's place / And must command the house" (89–90).

According to Frankford, being a good husband means satisfying one's appetite—eating—as he earlier tells Nicholas to "[p]lay the good husband, and away to supper" (VIII.31), and the first thing Wendoll does as "husband" is to tell Anne that they will "sup ... / ... in your private chamber" (XI.91–2), an act that clearly brings together oral consumption and sexual activity. Anne reminds him that she is "Master Frankford's wife" (93–94), a title fraught with complication if Wendoll regards himself as "husband now in Master Frankford's place." Cranwell's request that he "be spared from supper" (97) is not only convenient for Wendoll and possibly an indication of Cranwell's collusion (with either Frankford or Wendoll) but may also indicate his understanding of what "supper" actually entails. Even as Anne attempts to maintain, or at least return to, the role of chaste wife, the men around her undermine her ability to do so. Wendoll happily anticipates fulfilment of his oral and sexual appetite, while Anne notes that what she previously "granted" "for want of wit," she now "yield[s] through fear" (112–13). Having failed earlier to close her ears to Wendoll's declaration of love and having been persuaded by the hyperbolic predictions of his down-

15 There are obvious parallels between *Othello* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, to the extent that Peter Rudnysky argues that Heywood's play may have been a source text for Shakespeare's. However, one interesting difference is that Frankford rejects the "ocular proof" Othello demands (*Othello* 3.3.365), telling Nicholas, "Thy eyes may be deceived" (VIII.86).

16 David Cook claims that "[c]ontrary to his own interests as a lover, Wendoll first urges Frankford to stay, and then offers to accompany him" (358). This is not quite true. Wendoll's first remark is an aside in response to Anne's "hope" that Frankford's "business craves no such dispatch / That [he] must ride tonight," in which he says, "I hope it doth" (XI.57–58). His later offer to go with Frankford must therefore be seen as mere lip service, in contrast to Anne's pleas which appear genuine.

fall, she cannot close her body to him now. Her initial aural openness and credulity—even in the absence of desire—becomes sexual openness.

While Anne is constructed in the play as being sexually open to Wendoll, despite exhibiting no desire for him, the spatial representation of Wendoll's sexual penetration, as shown by Frankford's journey through the house, suggests her relative closure. Frankford carefully describes his passage with Nicholas, noting that they have harnessed their horses beyond the gates, unlocked the "outward gate" (XIII.8), opened the "hall door," and crossed the "withdrawing chamber" (9), before coming to "the last door" (24) that opens into the "polluted bedchamber" (14). Frankford's penetration into "[t]he place where sins in all their ripeness dwell" (16) retraces Wendoll's path from his first coming to the house on horseback to his entering the bedchamber and emphasizes the connection between the bedchamber and Anne's body: both are accessed only by Frankford and Wendoll, and both are central to the structure of the household (Comensoli 73).¹⁷ In addition, the centrality of Anne's body and the marriage bed reflects the way in which the household—and society—is organized around marriage. Anne's adultery not only breaks her marital bond with Frankford but destroys his friendship with Wendoll and threatens his connection with Anne's brother, Sir Francis Acton.¹⁸

Despite staging that suggests Anne's relative closure, Frankford sees his wife as excessively open, wanting more than he can give. When trying to determine Anne's motive for adultery, he suggests it is based on some kind of "want" (XIII.108), the same "want" or desire that prompts her liking for "every pleasure, fashion, and new toy," items he declares he has provided "even beyond [his] calling" (110–11). He therefore implies not only that Anne has an appetite for wasteful trifles, a whim that he has tried to appease, but that this same appetite is associated with unsanctioned sexual desire. Anne, though, has no explanation for her behaviour (Lieblein 192). Focused on the assumption that Anne's openness to Wendoll is a result of her desire or appetite, despite her inability to put her "want" into words, Frankford fails to consider how his own openness to, and desire for, his friend may have led to the destruction of his marriage. Frankford, after all, was the first to "[e]ntreat [Wendoll] in" (IV.26); he insisted on feeding

17 Thomas Moisan points out that having the bedchamber offstage ensures that audience attention is focused not on Anne's actions but on Frankford's response to them. His reaction therefore guides audience response to Anne (181–82).

18 Rebecca Ann Bach notes that in the final scene, as Anne lies dying, Frankford and Sir Francis "remarry one another" (512).

Wendoll and then could not eat without him. Anne may be adulterous in displacing her husband with Wendoll, but Frankford appears to have committed the first offence. Long before Anne agrees to an affair, Wendoll notes that Frankford is the one “[t]o whom [his] heart is joined and knit together” (VI.50), and Frankford earlier admits that he has “preferred [Wendoll] to a second place / In my opinion, and my best regard” (IV.34–35), the place, at least nominally, awarded a wife.¹⁹ Frankford, though, does not acknowledge any wrongdoing.²⁰ He does not ask for time to be rolled back to when he first invited Wendoll in, or to when Wendoll made his first overtures to Anne, but only to Anne’s “first offence” (XIII.62).

There has been much debate about whether an early modern audience would have considered Frankford’s punishment of Anne excessively harsh or overly lenient.²¹ In either case, his punishment allows her to maintain an appearance of chastity while ensuring his own closure to her. Anne is most concerned that Frankford neither “mark” “[n]or hack” her (XIII.99–100), and he agrees not to “mark [her] for a strumpet” (155).²² Even as Anne requests that she be allowed to maintain an appearance of physical wholeness, despite her sexual penetration, her remorse is immediate and she appears particularly to regret her previous openness. She now declares, “[She] would [she] had no tongue, no ears, no eyes, / No apprehension, no capacity” (XIII.91–92). She wants to limit all sensory input and be the proverbial “[d]iscreet woman [who has] neither eyes nor ears” (Tilley W683). This desire, along with her later declaration that she will eat and drink no more, can be considered emblematic of her wish for complete physical closure: she will no longer “sup” with anyone, anywhere. Frankford comes to see Anne’s refusal to eat as a sign of repentance and

19 This line is ambiguous as Frankford may mean that Wendoll is second to Anne. Nonetheless, the idea that both Anne and Wendoll have “second place” in Frankford’s affections unites them even prior to their affair.

20 While both Nicholas and Sir Francis consider Wendoll primarily responsible for Anne’s downfall, Frankford ignores his former friend’s culpability once he has chased Wendoll from his house. Paula McQuade argues that Frankford cannot acknowledge Wendoll’s guilt, because he would then have to admit his own fault (249).

21 Critics who consider Frankford to have treated Anne leniently include Bromley, Kiefer, and van Fossen. In contrast, Atkinson, Canuteson, Comensoli, McClintock, McQuade, and Panek consider Frankford’s treatment excessively harsh or vindictive.

22 Cynthia Lewis argues that Anne’s request that Frankford not “mark” her, along with her later urging that Nick tell Frankford of her suffering, is a sign that she is focused more on her own well-being than on Frankford’s (30).

reconsiders his own closure to her, accepting her as his wife and mother of his children just before she dies. A number of critics support the view of Anne's starvation as penance (Atkinson 25; Kiefer 89; van Fossen xxxi); however, this overlooks two issues. First, in terms of Protestant theology, penance through "works" is unconscionable. Second, Anne's self-imposed starvation results in her suicide and that, according to Christian theology, would lead to her eternal damnation (Panek 372). Death is not simply a side effect of Anne's penance but her goal, as Jenkin notes when he remarks, "She hath plainly starved herself, and now she is as lean as a lath. She ever looks for the good hour" (xvii.35–37). If Anne shows little evidence of will or desire in life, she plainly desires death.

While fasting as penance would have smacked of "papacy" in the early Protestant church, there was a long history in the Christian church of advocating dietary restraint, especially for women, and as Brathwait's insistence that women abstain from "luscious fare" indicates, this did not stop with the Reformation. The early church's teachings on the role of Eve's appetite or desire for the "forbidden fruit" (Bynum 36) informed the idea that gluttony was one of the worst sins for both sexes, particularly because it was believed to lead to other vices such as impure thoughts and sexual immorality (216). Fasting was therefore advocated throughout church history as a method of controlling any tendency to "impurity" and was considered particularly appropriate for women (216). Anne's fast can be linked to that of medieval visionaries of both sexes who aimed for a higher spirituality by denying themselves food; it can also be connected to the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century accounts of girls who miraculously lived without food or drink (Gutierrez, *Shall She Famish* 80). The virtue, obedience, and godliness of these girls is most often emphasized, and in this context one can understand the affirmation given to Anne's "virtue" of starvation by her family and friends and their failure to consider the potential damnation she faces as a suicide.²³

Anne's fast, though, differs significantly from those of medieval saints and ailing young women because of the will that prompts it. While fasting could signify virtue, it had to be done in moderation and undertaken for the right reasons. Clearly, Anne's fast lacks moderation and her motivation is problematic. She simply "wish[es her]self dead" (xvi.62). Unlike those fasting for religious purposes and those who, by all accounts, were kept

23 When Frankford calls Wendoll a "Judas," he notes the latter's suicide and declares, "Pray, pray, lest I live to see / Thee Judas-like hanged on an elder tree" (xiii.77–78). He does not consider that his wife, not his friend, will commit suicide and that he will witness her death.

alive by the grace of God rather than by food, Anne is not quelling her own desire by fasting but fully expressing and realizing her will. Furthermore, like her husband who claims a higher authority when he pronounces her sentence, declaring, “[his] words are registered in Heaven already” (XIII.153), Anne also declares that her will is “writ in heaven and decreed here” (XVI.66). In other words, Anne’s starvation is not simply a penitential reaction to Frankford’s sentence but a rebellion against it, one that is asserted with the same divine authority he has claimed. He may banish her to a manor “seven mile off” (XIII.166), but she can take herself out of this world in a way that is deemed virtuous and that allows the name of wife to be restored to her.

Anorexia, as defined by psychiatrist Hilde Bruch, is “self-inflicted starvation in the absence of recognizable organic disease and in the midst of ample food” (quoted in Bynum 201) and Anne can, by this definition, be considered anorexic. However, the issue for anorexics is not simply limiting food intake but gaining power over one’s body and one’s environment. It is a form of “self-assertion” or “rebellion” (Furst 4–6). Historically, controlling food intake has been the one method of protest available to women. Caroline Walker Bynum notes that in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, it was far harder to renounce family ties, avoid marriage, or reject the sexual overtures of a husband than it was to abstain from food (191), and while Anne’s self-starvation occurs a century later, there was little interim improvement in women’s ability to exercise control in these areas. Anne’s fast, therefore, may be an attempt at self-assertion through the only method available to her (Furst 6).²⁴ In addition, it is, paradoxically, a method whereby Anne gains control of both her own body and the entire situation. She not only removes herself from her husband’s control through death but also gets him to satisfy her “great desire” (XVII 49) and see her, something he had declared he would not do (XIII.180–81). She even gains control of his body, albeit temporarily, when he renames her his wife for, according to the biblical tenets that governed marriage, a wife was deemed to have a right to her husband’s body—for payment of

24 I agree with Frey and Lieblein that Anne’s starvation is a sign of self-assertion particularly directed at Frankford. This is in direct contrast to Comensoli’s claims that Anne’s “self punishment has successfully suppressed power, self-assertion, and autonomy, all forms of control forbidden to women” (82). Gutierrez offers the middle ground by arguing that Anne’s starvation “signifies both conventional and subversive behavior: it is religious salvation *and* political resistance” (*Shall She Famish Then?* 35).

the marital debt—in the same way as a husband had a right to his wife’s body (1 Corinthians 7:4).

If Anne’s fast suggests the resistance and self-assertion characteristic of anorexia, her view of her body is also similar to that expressed by many anorexic women. These women often despise their bodies and starve themselves to control their sexuality (Bynum 202), and Anne can be considered to do the same, as she wishes to be rid of her body through death. Moreover, she can be seen as trying to control perception of herself as a sexual being given that her starvation limits her female sexual characteristics. As the body seeks to nourish itself, it draws on its own fat stores, found in the breasts and thighs in women. As a result, the fasting female body becomes more androgynous in shape. In addition, one of the first bodily functions to cease in fasting women is menstruation, effectively removing the primary sign of a woman’s sexual maturity. In a culture in which chastity is constructed as anticipating its contrast, in which chaste closure anticipates openness and penetration, any sign of sexual maturity is a sign of vulnerability; it signifies the potential for sexual intercourse. By eliminating signs of her sexual maturity, Anne redefines herself. She is no longer a fallen woman, one who is too open, but one who has renounced her sexuality and is now permanently closed. The change is even apparent on her face. Fearful that she will go to her grave “mark[ed] ... for a strumpet,” she asks Sir Charles if he can see her “fault” in her blushing cheek, to which he replies, “Alas, good mistress, sickness hath not left you / Blood in your face enough to make you blush” (xvii.55–59).²⁵ Without blood to show her shame and without blood to show her sexual maturity, Anne is once again deemed chaste by her husband.

Frankford’s acceptance of Anne as a reformed wife is, however, tinged with irony when one considers that it results from the elimination of the sexual characteristics that previously defined Anne as marriageable. Once defined as a “spotted strumpet” (xiii.109, 125; xvii.78), she cannot be considered an acceptable wife until all potential for openness is removed, and, no longer open, she can hardly be a wife. There are also other problems in reading Anne’s “desexed” body as that of a reformed wife. Anne may have renounced her sexuality through her starvation but, as Nancy Gutierrez argues, the very appearance of Anne onstage in bed, the site of lovemaking, along with the emphasis on her physical appearance, sexualizes her body

25 Sharon Creaser, who argues that the play emphasizes the public ramifications of Anne’s private act, reads Anne’s question not as a sign of her continuing fear that her face may reveal her guilt but as an indication of her desire to be a public exemplum and for others to see her guilt in her face (293).

in the final scene (“Double Standard” 88–89). Indeed, Anne’s appearance in this scene looks back to the moment she is revealed as an adulteress. When Frankford sees her sleeping with Wendoll, the audience is asked to imagine the scene as Frankford recreates it in language: “I have found them lying / close in each other’s arms, and fast asleep” (XIII.43–44). Anne then appears on stage in her nightclothes, likely the same loose clothing in which she now appears in the bed. Even as she is displayed as a repentant desexualized wife, the audience is reminded of Anne’s adultery.

The final display of Anne’s body is further complicated as the actual body in the bed is that of a boy actor. While Lisa Jardine argues that “[i]n tragedy, the willing suspension of disbelief does customarily extend ... to the taking of the female parts by boy players” (23), other critics are less certain. Mario DiGangi notes the frequently sensual display of the male body in early modern drama; he insists “[w]e ignore the homoerotic sensuality of the drama at the cost of misjudging the centrality of homoeroticism to the ideological and social practices of early modern England” (28). Peter Stallybrass argues that the bed scenes common in early modern tragedy and tragicomedy call attention to the body of the boy actor because they emphasize the undressed body (“Transvestism” 64–65). Moreover, he notes that the body part which is most commonly fetishized in death scenes is the female breast, the very secondary sexual characteristic not present on the early modern stage even as the audience is called on to see it (71–72).

While attention is not explicitly directed to Anne’s breasts in the final scene of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, there are signs that her upper body is increasingly revealed. When she “enters ... in her bed” (XVII.38),²⁶ her first words could be associated with a gesture pushing back the bed-covers as she cries, “Sick, sick, O sick! Give me some air, I pray you” (40). And, if her body is not revealed then, it is when she asks those around her to “[r]aise me a little higher in my bed” (54). Anne’s upper body appears to become increasingly upright through her final moments, as she reiterates her impassioned plea to Frankford, “Pardon, O pardon me!” (86, 92), a cry that would undoubtedly be accompanied in performance by movement toward him, before she dies “embracing” her husband, an action suggesting that she is sufficiently upright to put her arms around him.²⁷ This exposure of Anne’s—and therefore the boy actor’s—upper body, albeit in

²⁶ This stage direction is included in the 1607 edition of the play. As Scobie notes, how Anne enters in the bed is subject to speculation: whether the bed was revealed in the discovery space or carried or pushed onto the stage (note to XVII.38).

a nightgown, draws attention to her emaciated state. In contrast to death scenes in which an audience is asked to visualize female breasts that are not there,²⁸ the absence of female breasts operates differently here. It reveals the consequences of Anne's repentance and starvation—and harks back to her adultery as the cause of that starvation—at the same time as it reminds the audience of the flat-chested body of the boy actor. In both cases, it evokes a sexually charged body even as Frankford “wed[s Anne] once again” (117).

The presence of Anne's undressed emaciated body in bed in the final scene underscores the instability of her representation throughout the play. Even as her body is shown to be closed and desexualized, it reminds the audience of her adultery and potentially of the boy actor playing Anne. The way in which Anne's final appearance both hides and discloses her fault parallels the way in which her refusal to eat, her suppression of her oral appetite, can be interpreted. Within the playworld (a society that echoes even as it distorts the early modern world beyond), Anne's starvation is seen as a sign of female virtue. She is, after all, apparently suppressing all desire. This outward virtue, however, both covers and reveals her essential rebellion and insatiable desire. Anne desires death and exerts her own will to achieve it; she refuses to remain within the boundaries prescribed for her.

Caught in an act of adultery, Anne is constructed by her husband as sexually insatiable because she fails to demonstrate complete aural closure. She listens and obeys his demand that she show Wendoll “loving'st courtesy” (iv.80) and is punished when her aural openness to Wendoll leads to sexual openness. In contrast, even though Frankford “[e]ntreats [Wendoll] in” and “prefer[s] him to a second place” (26, 34) potentially displacing his wife, his desire and aural openness are not conflated with sexual desire and are never criticized in the playworld. Despite Anne's inability to offer a motive for her behaviour, her openness to Wendoll is constructed as signifying *her* desire rather than his desire for her. Moreover, her desire is deemed undifferentiated and all-encompassing. Her sexual openness is preceded by and associated with aural openness, while her later oral closure, demonstrated by her rejection of food, signifies her sexual refor-

27 My argument that Anne is the one who moves toward Frankford and puts her arms around him is based on her statement that she “dies thus embracing thee” (xvii 122); she does not say that she “dies thus in thy embrace.”

28 Stallybrass uses Cleopatra's death scene in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* as an example of a scene that explicitly draws attention to the female breast as Cleopatra does not put the asp just to her arm, as in Plutarch's account, but also to her breast (“Transvestism” 74).

mation and suppression of sexual desire even as this sign is destabilized and sexualized by her onstage appearance. She may die without “[b]lood ... enough” (xvii.59) to show her fault, but the very presence of her undressed body in bed is a visual reminder of the unstaged scene of her adultery with Wendoll. While the final scene does indeed make public Anne’s private act of sin and perhaps encourages Heywood’s citizen audience to reflect on the public impact of their own private actions (Creaser 294), it also reveals the difficulties faced by women as listeners in early modern society. With his exploration of Anne’s dilemma, the conflation of her aural, oral, and sexual openness, Heywood does not simply dramatize conduct-book morality as some critics suggest (Bromley 262; Creaser 285–86), but also explores the inherent contradictions of their tenets. He reveals that the “maze” in which Anne finds herself is not a “labyrinth of sin” (vi.159, 160), but the web of complex and contradictory demands on female behaviour.

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