

POIS'NED ALE: GERTRUDE'S POWER POSITION IN *HAMLET*

by

Erin Elizabeth Lehmann

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Erin Elizabeth Lehmann

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Matthew C. Hansen, Ph.D.	Chair, Supervisory Committee
Linda Marie Zaerr, Ph.D.	Member, Supervisory Committee
Edward Mac Test, Ph.D.	Member, Supervisory Committee
Lisa McClain, Ph.D.	Member, Supervisory Committee

The final reading approval of the thesis was granted by Matthew C. Hansen, Ph.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The thesis was approved for the Graduate College by John R. Pelton, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College.

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## ABSTRACT

*Hamlet* has over 4,000 lines, and Gertrude speaks less than 200 of those lines (about 4% of the entire play), but her roles as a widow, wife, and mother drive much of the play's action. This document brings together scholarship surrounding Gertrude's roles within the play and new research into the historical cultural milieu of early modern England focused on working women to learn more about the cultural patterns influencing the creation of this character. What results is the assertion that analogues to Gertrude and her situation in *Hamlet* can be found in early modern widows who worked as printers and brewsters.

At first glance, Gertrude's political role as queen consort suggests parallels with royal widows or monarchs, and certainly these do exist. When we look to Shakespeare's own life, though, it seems more likely for Shakespeare to have had knowledge of the lives of brewsters and printers than of royal widows. Shakespeare's friend Richard Field married a widowed printer and brewing was such a widespread phenomenon that women's presence in the industry was largely recognized on a cultural level. Using Greenblatt's circulation of social energy, I argue that Shakespeare would have been influenced by working women and that we see as much in Gertrude's situation in the play.

Analogues to working class widows lie in the ambiguous nature of public and private in early modern England. This thesis illuminates similarities between the intersection of domestic and economic duties for women printers and brewsters and

Gertrude's overlapping political and familial obligations. I also engage with the stereotypes that resulted from the transgression of the public/private boundaries. As women involved in male-dominated trades, female printers and brewsters were often saddled with all of the anxieties surrounding their vocations, resulting in typecasts that depicted these women as greedy, deceitful, and lewd. Gertrude both adheres to and breaks these traditional stereotypes. In her marriage to Claudius, however, Gertrude differs from working class widows, though some similarities do exist.

This document poses the argument that Gertrude's position in *Hamlet* reflects the cultural significance of women's work. It utilizes research about the lives of women who printed and brewed alongside primary works like ballads and court cases as a lens through which to view Gertrude's role in the play. In doing so, this thesis crafts a new interpretation of Gertrude as an analogue to working widows, the situations they faced, and their power position in early modern England.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A search for Hamlet in the Modern Language Association International

Bibliography turns up 5,151 results. A search for Gertrude only turns up 71. Because *Hamlet* is one of the most studied plays in the history of the English language, I expected to find a lot of research. What I did not expect was to find Gertrude, one of the most fascinating characters I've ever read, to have received less critical attention from scholars than other Shakespearean characters. In a play of over 4000 lines, Gertrude speaks less than 200 of those lines (about 4% of the entire play), but her roles as a widow, wife, and mother are crucial to much of the play's action. Most scholarship surrounding Gertrude concentrates on her roles as they operate within the world of the play. Meanwhile, certain scholars of the cultural-historical milieu of early modern England have recently focused their research on the lives of women – particularly working class women. My thesis will combine these two bodies of research to explore the ideas informing Shakespeare's crafting of Gertrude, ultimately arguing that analogues to her character and situations can be found in early modern women. This introduction offers an outline of my theoretical approach, a framework for my argument within the context of extant scholarship on Gertrude, followed by a chapter-by-chapter preview of my argument.

To accomplish this, I intend to use a new-historicist perspective that utilizes close textual analysis to better understand cultural context and influence. Specifically, I will apply Stephen Greenblatt's theory of the circulation of social energy (158). Greenblatt's main argument is that cultural values or pervasive stereotypes manifest themselves within

an author's work. In "Towards a Poetics of Culture," Greenblatt identifies two principal causes for this phenomenon. The first cause he examines is the influence of economic factors upon a playwright (153). Ultimately, writers write for an audience who will in some way purchase that work (be it in the form of a book or space in the theatre).

Greenblatt posits that Shakespeare would have written to ensure the financial success of his endeavors (153). Looking more closely at the composition of Shakespeare's audiences, it becomes clear, as Andrew Gurr explains, that "the wives of citizens were regular playgoers...[and] it may not be wildly wrong to think of them and their lesser neighbours the prosperous artisan class as a silent majority in the playhouses" (76-7). If a sizeable portion of Shakespeare's audience was made up of working class citizens and their wives, then it follows, as Phyllis Rackin observes, that "the collective economic power [women] possessed as paying customers in the playhouse meant that none of Shakespeare's plays could have been successful in his own time if it failed to please them" (47). This directly impacts the formation of Gertrude's character in that Shakespeare would have had to appease the desires of the women in the audience when writing Gertrude into the play.

In addition to the practical influence of a consumer upon a producer, Greenblatt points to the more subtle absorption of cultural values into the author's mindset. Using Greenblatt's idea as a springboard of sorts, my thesis will explore common perceptions of early modern widows and the echoes of these perceptions in Shakespeare's construction of Gertrude. Early modern England had distinct notions of the way women should and should not act. These notions were reflected in widespread stereotypes and anxieties about women, which manifested themselves in a variety of forms – including traditional

literary artifacts like plays as well as popular ballads – that we can now access as textual traces of a collective obsession with the inward nature of women. When we turn to Gertrude, then, I want to examine her in light of the anxieties that surrounded women, and specifically, widows in positions of power. Those women who served as active members and/or leaders of businesses exercised power in the day-to-day operations of the business and, by extension, impacted the lives of their (or more properly their husband's) apprentices and employees. These women were often perceived by society as a whole to be susceptible to all ills committed by women in all walks of life and, in a fascinating paradox, were simultaneously among the most visible and the most invisible women of the time. While women who worked in and even ran businesses were far from invisible to customers, they were largely absent from official documents, unless they were being fingered for wrongful business practices. Many of these ideas echo in the treatment of Gertrude in *Hamlet*.

As a queen, Gertrude is treated with many of the same anxieties that surrounded other women of the time. In the play, these anxieties seem to stem from the intersection of the domestic or private and public spheres of her life. In discussing the intersection of private and public, stereotypes, and marriage, it's important to first establish what "public" and "private" mean. As Jürgen Habermas explains, the ideas of public and private as we consider them today are relatively recent in their development. For Shakespeare and his contemporaries, these realms would have been largely conflated, operating more on a scale than as isolated categories. McGill University's *Making Publics* database attests to the complex nature of private versus public in early modern Europe, showcasing an ongoing examination of the creation and complexity of a

“public.” The site holds the work of many contributors, including Steven Mullaney, whose essay “What’s Hamlet to Habermas? Theatrical Publics and the Elizabethan Stage” examines *Hamlet* and the theatre in light of the theories of public and private as they emerge in the work of Habermas. Habermas, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, explains that to be public meant that something or someone was symbolically represented. In other words, there was little separation between public and private in the ways we imagine them today. Status, nevertheless, loomed large. For the purposes of thesis, I imagine the public realm to be the representation and perception of a person within the larger community – their exteriority. The private, then, constitutes a person’s interior perception of themselves. In defining interiority and exteriority, I adopt Katherine Maus’ definitions as they are discussed in detail below.

Habermas explains the interconnectedness of the two when he explains that with an increase of public regulation, which adopts the “interests of civil society as its own,” the result is that “the interventions by public power in the affairs of private people transmitted impulses that indirectly grew out of the latter’s own sphere” (142). In other words, as the private, or previously unregulated spheres grow to require official interference (as happens in the worlds of printing and brewing), the regulatory sphere takes its nature from the private needs of the growing industry, thereby interconnecting the two.

This correlation is evident in both Judith Bennett’s and Helen Smith’s work on brewsters (female brewers) and female printers, respectively. Within the field of brewing, for instance, small household brewing businesses transitioned to a commercial enterprise, particularly between the years of 1495 and 1599 when new licensing schemes made it

extremely difficult for women to practice brewing. This coincides with the emergence of public theaters in London, especially during the late 1500's and early 1600's. This same theme is visible through Marjorie McIntosh's studies about working women. These works illuminate the struggles women faced in businesses in which the domestic and official realms overlapped and became increasingly regulated, moving from smaller-scale family practices to large industries. Each book focuses on the ways in which women's roles did and did not change as male-only guilds came to dominate these industries. Furthermore, these authors offer a better understanding of the cultural values and stereotypes that surrounded these women and provided cultural recognition of their officially unacknowledged roles in the economic system of early modern England.

Marjorie McIntosh's book *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* further uncovers the presence of working women and their contribution to the English economy alongside the roles they held and the societal implications of those roles. McIntosh contextualizes the complex lives of working women in English society, exploring the social setting of women's workplace, the kinds of work they did, the struggles and benefits of those jobs, and the issue of financial limitations. McIntosh argues that while women's work was largely undervalued in prescriptive texts and by officials, their work contributed to the economy and culture of England in important ways (4). Her work also provides an introduction to brewsters and supports the assertions of both Bennett and Smith.

Bennett's work *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World* traces the development of brewing, providing information surrounding the regulations that came with the expansion of the trade. Bennett describes the pervasive

ideas and anxieties surrounding brewsters – including their greed and propensity for lewd conduct and dishonest business practices – without placing blame. She observes that while the specific work women did changed over time, the way that work was thought of did not. With the commercialization of brewing, more and more women found other positions of menial labor while the few who remained in the business were invisible on an official level, forced into more private roles within brewing or adopted under the name of their husbands. While the specific tasks completed by these women changed, the status of their work as menial and marginal remained the same. Bennett attributes this to the presence of a patriarchal system in which the hierarchy of men over women remained in place. During the time in which this business shifted hands, however, these working women enjoyed a freedom that wasn't widely or universally available, thus offering an inviting analog to Gertrude's character. As a queen consort, we expect Gertrude to hold certain political responsibilities, though her marriage to Claudius leads us to understand that any decisions she makes take place under the influence of her husband as is further explored in my next chapter. Similarly, brewsters made business decisions, though these mostly took place under the power of their husbands.

Smith traces a similar development in printing. Like Bennett, Smith suggests that the presence of women within printing can hardly be denied, yet they remain largely absent from documents noting ownership of the business. Despite this, Smith demonstrates that there is evidence of women running the business, especially when the husband was out of town or deceased. What this means, then, is that these women must have been involved all along, as it is unlikely that the women learned how to run the business in a short time period solely for the purposes of keeping things moving during

the husband's absence. Women's conspicuous absence from court documents prior to a husband's absence affirms the patriarchal system at work in the official capacity of a business and her prominence during his absence stretches the roles women were typically allowed to inhabit. This suggests, in short, that women's work was not absent, but merely invisible from the eyes of the guild, as seen in brewing. This position, as Smith points out, led to anxieties about the nature of women in positions of power, anxieties similar to those scholars have suggested circulate around Gertrude.

It is the ambiguous reception of women in power that has led me to examine working class widows. Gertrude's power in the play is relatively ambiguous. While we have scenes where Gertrude gives orders, they are rare. Mostly, we see Gertrude silently sharing the stage with Claudius. Rarely do we see Gertrude assert her power within the play. Still, Gertrude *is* powerful if for no other reason than the fact that she occupies the role of queen. While there is certainly cause to examine Gertrude in light of royal widows, I have chosen to focus my attention on working class widows due to their influence over the composition of *Hamlet* and Gertrude, specifically.

As Gurr's work has pointed out, a large majority of Shakespeare's female audience would have been women of lower ranks. Shakespeare himself would likely have had more interaction with these kinds of women as well. While it's hard to prove that Shakespeare interacted with particular women, it might not be a large leap to imagine that the women Shakespeare might have had the closest contact with were those working in printing houses and ale houses. One of Shakespeare's friends was Richard Field, a printer of the time who married the widow Jacqueline Vautrollier in 1588. That same year, she broke a court order to discontinue printing and published six editions of *The Copie of a*

*Letter Sent out of England to Don Bernardin Mendoza* (H. Smith 123). It is not impossible that Shakespeare would have had some kind of knowledge (first or second hand) about the marriage between Field and Vautrollier (H. Smith 123).

The same can be said of the women working in ale houses. As a common gathering place and large source of gossip and ballads, it's not a large leap to imagine Shakespeare might have been somewhat familiar with the lives of these women. While Shakespeare may have performed some of his plays at court, it's likely more of his daily exposure to women's issues came from the lower classes. Furthermore, due to the popularity of brewing (and its close relationship to the theatre), common perceptions about brewsters and their interiority would have been known, and absorbed, by Shakespeare (Gurr 43).

This interest in women's interiority was a popular phenomenon. Maus explains that a rising focal point in the theatre of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was that of inwardness. Maus argues that as the population in London burgeoned, mainly due to migration from local towns and villages, newcomers to London faced the challenge of learning to judge the trustworthiness of others (24). Her argument is that the transition from small town to bustling metropolis required people to adopt new methods of gauging the interiority of those around them, contributing to an increasing fascination with the moral nature of others and how that invisible trait might be judged (65-6). Similarly, women who found themselves in businesses like printing and brewing were required to learn how to judge the trustworthiness of the increasing number of individuals they conducted business with while also being examined in return. This fascination with inwardness spilled over onto the English stage, which "seems deliberately to foster

theatergoers' capacity to use partial and limited presentations as a basis for conjecture about what is undisplayed or undisplayable. Its spectacles are understood to depend upon and indicate the shapes of things unseen," but that "in a culture in which truth is imagined to be inward and invisible, and in which playwrights seem perversely to insist upon parading the shortcomings of their art, theatrical representation becomes subject to profound and fascinating crises of authenticity" (32). Maus describes a highly complex understanding of inwardness, since only that which cannot be displayed externally constitutes inwardness. Anything else is external and "but the trappings" of that within. Still, those "trappings" are all we have as insight into the unseen and unknowable interiority of characters (32). This representation of inwardness reflects the complexities of judging interiority in really useful ways.

The question of the true nature of Gertrude's interiority crops up not only in Shakespeare's work, but also in scholarly pieces written about *Hamlet*, and specifically, Gertrude. Perhaps one of the most obvious examples is Robert Smith's "Hamlet and Gertrude, or the Conscience of the Queen," which provides an examination of Gertrude's guilt to the charges of hasty marriage, incest, adultery, and murder. In "A Critical History of *Hamlet*," Susanne L. Wofford suggests that *Hamlet* scholarship can be divided into three trends: psychological (mostly Freudian, focusing on Hamlet's disgust with women and their sexuality), performance based (which examines the play as an entity all its own with a life all its own when performed on stage), and historical (focused on common themes of the Elizabethan views of themes like revenge, hate, and free will). While scholarship on Gertrude reflects these larger patterns, it also follows a continuum that ranges between a focus on Gertrude's interiority (usually granting her a certain deal of

agency) to her exteriority (which generally views her as lacking agency). This thesis attempts to bring together the themes of public/private, interior/exterior, and invisible/visible by bringing together evidence of Gertrude's private or interior self and her exterior, publicly represented self while also being sensitive to the actions she takes both within and outside of the view of others.

In 1919, T.S. Eliot famously examined Gertrude as the "objective correlative," or the object meant to instill emotional response in the reader, in *Hamlet* (qtd in Wofford 193). Essentially, Gertrude is posited as the means of instilling in the reader Hamlet's own sense of disgust. Jacqueline Rose then responded with the argument that Eliot's logic inherently accuses Gertrude of not being psychologically bad enough and, in turn, aesthetically good enough (as discussed in Wofford 193). Wofford explains that this discussion soon took on the objective of re-examining *Hamlet* with the goal of "search[ing] for evidence of just how sexually disgusting his mother had become" (194). When Dover Wilson completed his work claiming that Gertrude was, indeed, sexually deviant enough to justify Hamlet's disgust, it opened the door to further investigations of this nature. A swarm of critical analyses concerning Gertrude's role as an adulteress followed, mainly focused on finding a clear-cut answer to whether or not Gertrude is sexually deviant.

Authors like Noel Blincoe, Richard Levin, and Bertram Leon Joseph follow this pattern in their search for textual evidence of Gertrude's guilt or innocence and moral deviance within the world of the play. What these authors share is the view of Gertrude mainly as a sexual object rather than as a complete character. Blincoe focuses mainly on Gertrude's sexual deviancy, suggesting that she had an affair with Claudius before King

Hamlet died. Richard Levin similarly examines Gertrude's "elusive libido." In Levin's treatment of Gertrude, she is viewed as almost entirely lacking interiority. Bertram Leon Joseph examines Gertrude's marriage as a means of usurping the throne, which demonstrates a certain ability to scheme, but ultimately leaves Gertrude's motivations for doing so entirely unexamined, again resisting an in-depth analysis of Gertrude's character. In his article "Hamlet, Gertrude and the Ghost: The Punishment of Women in Renaissance Drama," Martin Coyle examines the role of punishment in the play alongside other contemporary works. Coyle's interest lies in the role of punishment and the ways characters are punished, though he does briefly discuss how Hamlet's role as avenger changes his relationship with Gertrude. Again, though, the emphasis lies almost entirely with Hamlet's interiority and says relatively little about Gertrude's interiority.

Studies that examine Gertrude's marriage as a product of political scheming, while still focused on Gertrude's exterior representation as queen, begin to delve into the interiority of her character. In 1964, Baldwin Maxwell viewed Gertrude as a more complicated figure in his work "Hamlet's Mother." In this piece, he explores Gertrude as a resourceful character, though he still maintains a clinical distance. While his main concern is with Gertrude's ability to understand the situations she is placed in, he still attributes much of her relationship with Claudius to her lust for and subservience to him. Manuel Aguirre in "Life, Crown, and Queen: Gertrude and the Theme of Sovereignty" sees Gertrude's marriage to Claudius as a mostly political move within the play; while this allows for reason within Gertrude's repertoire of tools, Aguirre ultimately says little about her interiority. *Hamlet without Hamlet* by Margarita de Grazia also explores issues

of succession and rights to the throne of Denmark, though her research focuses more on Hamlet and Claudius than on Gertrude.

Other work, such as that of Rebecca Smith, has begun to delve further into Gertrude's interiority, though it ultimately fails to reach it. Smith has written multiple pieces, including "Gertrude: Scheming Adulteress or Loving Mother?" and *A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude*, which mainly focus on Gertrude's clashing loyalties. Smith argues that Gertrude, while an object of lust, is not actually lustful, but rather bows to the will of the central characters in *Hamlet*. Smith demonstrates an interest in Gertrude's family attachments and sense of loyalty, which delves into Gertrude's interiority. Smith presents a Gertrude that is entirely sympathetic to the outside eye, pointing out the complicated situations in which Gertrude is placed. What's missing, however, is any sense of agency in Gertrude's character. Smith asserts Gertrude's undying subservience to the men of the play, again placing her as a character who reflects the views and situations of others in the play. The result is that Gertrude, while not a flat character is limited and, as Smith argues, ultimately holds interest for the viewer only because the men in the play demonstrate interest in her.

Other scholars posit Gertrude in a different light. Harmonie Loberg gives Gertrude agency in "Queen Gertrude: Monarch, Mother, Murderer." In an examination of guilt within *Hamlet*, Loberg suggests that Gertrude is guilty of killing Ophelia, placing her as a parallel to Claudius within the play. While this piece still concerns itself with Gertrude's guilt or innocence, Loberg credits Gertrude with having motivations and desires, something lacking in other examinations of Gertrude.

While Loberg focuses on Gertrude's political ambitions, Akiko Kusunoki's piece "Oh Most Pernicious Woman: Gertrude in the Light of Ideas on Remarriage in Early Seventeenth-Century England" focuses on Gertrude's marriage to Claudius. Although Kusunoki comes the closest to examining Gertrude's interior life and the relationships between Gertrude, her son and husband, his focus is on setting Gertrude apart as a character with agency that would have been relatively shocking to her audience. My own treatment of Gertrude will be closest to this study in the sense that I will examine the cultural-historical milieu of the time surrounding working class widows, balanced with an examination of Gertrude's personal relationships with her son and husband alongside what little visible political power she demonstrates within the play.

Abigail Montgomery makes a bold move towards examining Gertrude's interiority in her piece "Enter QUEEN GERTRUDE Stage Center: Re-Viewing Gertrude as Full Participant and Active Interpreter in Hamlet." Montgomery's argument is that Gertrude demonstrates a sense of progression throughout the play; Montgomery analyzes the scenes in which Gertrude misleads Claudius concerning Hamlet's madness and drinks the poisoned drink as proof of Gertrude's agency and interiority within the play. Her final argument is that "*The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* certainly can bear and indeed profit from the understanding that it is just as thoroughly the tragedy of the queen" (114). In this way, Gertrude's interiority becomes a much larger issue.

A similar observation emerges from Frances J. Sardone's "Gertrude: The Queen of Denmark." Sardone, while interested in Gertrude's loyalties within the play, delves much further into her interiority to understand them. Sardone also gives space to an

examination of Gertrude's communication style, something that he argues reflects the interiority of the queen.

Psychological criticism has added an important layer to the discussion about Gertrude's interiority. In "Man and Wife Is One Flesh': *Hamlet* and the Confrontation with the Maternal Body," Janet Adelman adopts a psychological view that focuses on Gertrude as a source of Hamlet's anxieties about women's sexuality and the fear of death and the mother's womb. Though Gertrude is treated largely as a symbol for Freudian arguments, Adelman sees her as a more dangerous factor due to her ability to make choices. It is the focus on Gertrude's actions and decisions in the play that allows for a brief glimpse at the presence of a reasoning and feeling woman. These studies come closer to examining the interiority of Gertrude.

Other studies, like Dorothea Kehler's 1995 work "The First Quarto of *Hamlet*: Reforming Widow Gertrud" delves even further into her interiority. Kehler points to the development of Gertrude from the first quarto (1603) to the final Folio (1623) version of the play. She finds that as readers move from Q1 to Folio, Gertrude's character becomes increasingly more tortured and more political. Five years later, John Updike published his book *Gertrude and Claudius*, which presented a twist on *Hamlet*. In this work, Gertrude is a sympathetic character who is in love with Claudius but thwarted by her evil husband, King Hamlet. In essence, Gertrude's interiority takes center stage in this novel.

Following *Gertrude and Claudius*, performance-based scholarship came to focus more centrally on stage representations of Gertrude's interiority. Updike's novel prompted a new imagining of Gertrude among Shakespearean scholars. The same year Updike published his novel, Greenblatt examined Gertrude's marriage to Claudius as a

relationship that reflected Gertrude's interiority by pointing to important moments in the play where Gertrude takes actions that demonstrate her interior loyalties not only to Claudius, but also to her son. Maurice Hunt references Updike's work in his recently published piece "Gertrude's Interiority." Hunt argues that Gertrude has interiority and that it is visible within the play by examining Gertrude in Quartos 1 and 2 of *Hamlet* as well as the Folio version. Hunt traces similar developments in Gertrude's character to those highlighted by Kehler and places them alongside compelling arguments that interiority was an important idea in the Renaissance, and therefore both present an important facet of Gertrude's characterization.

Similar ideas of interiority are examined from the perspective of performance. In 2003, Elizabeth Klett wrote her article "Reading Between the Lines: Connecting with Gertrude and Ophelia in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" with the goal of helping readers to connect to the interior nature of Gertrude and Ophelia. Klett makes a compelling argument as to these women's relatability, yet much of her evidence comes from performances of the play. While Klett argues that the burden of making Gertrude relatable lies with the actresses who play her, J. Anthony Burton, in "The Lady Vanishes, or the Incredible Shrinking Gertrude" argues that in film adaptations of the play, the camera actually lessens Gertrude's presence within the play. Burton argues that Gertrude is given more interiority and is overall a more central character in Shakespeare's script than in filmed adaptations of *Hamlet*. What these authors point to, though through a performance lens, is the placement of Gertrude on the interiority/exteriority scale. Both authors concern themselves with Gertrude's power and internal emotions, ultimately arguing that they are present in the play text and can be built up or diminished in screen

performances. These writers share an interest in Gertrude as a character with an interior existence within the play.

My work builds on this focus on Gertrude's interiority by exploring the analogous interiority of brewsters and female printers. To do this, I look to points of intersection between the ideas offered by scholars of Gertrude and the work of Smith and Bennett. This thesis aims to combine the historical perspective into working class women's lives and struggles that Bennett and Smith provide with extant scholarship on Gertrude to illuminate the analogues between working women and Gertrude and provide a deeper understanding of both Shakespeare's play and the position of working widows in early modern England.

I will begin with a chapter that examines the ambiguous nature of public and private in early modern England and the ways in which the domestic and economic duties of women intersected in a manner similar to the way Gertrude's political and familial obligations do. This chapter will rely heavily on Habermas's theories of public and private. In this chapter, I will examine McIntosh, Bennett, and H. Smith's information about the sharing of physical business and domestic spaces as well as the overlap in women's roles within those spaces and contrast that with Gertrude's situation in *Hamlet*.

The next chapter will focus on the stereotypes that circulated surrounding brewsters and female printers in early modern England as a result of the ambiguous positions these women held within society. This chapter will utilize ballads, court cases, and the work of McIntosh, Bennett, and H. Smith to establish the correlation of anxieties held about working class widows and the anxieties the play presents about Gertrude.

This will be followed by a chapter dealing with the issue of remarriage. I will again turn to the work of McIntosh, Bennett and H. Smith to establish common perceptions of remarriage within the fields of brewing and printing and compare that to Gertrude's marriage to Claudius. This chapter will share similarities with Kusunoki's article, though I hope to further his ideas by examining their application to working class widows. I will then examine correlations between the treatment of Gertrude's marriage and the role marriage played within the working classes.

What the conclusion offers is the assertion that Gertrude functions as more than a mirror for the transformations that take place in the male characters of *Hamlet*. Rather, this thesis points to the possibility that Gertrude's situation in the play reflects the tensions surrounding working women, specifically brewsters and printers in early modern England. This work engages with the cultural significance of women's work, utilizing that information to provide another layer of complexity to the discussion surrounding Gertrude.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE INTERSECTION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

Perhaps one of the most prominent goals of Shakespearean scholarship surrounding Gertrude is that of classifying her within the play. This proves to be an extremely difficult and somewhat futile task as her character resists clear classification at every turn. She embodies so many roles (mother, wife, widow, queen) that it can be hard to define her based on any one of them. It is, however, the very tensions that arise from the multiplicity of her character that lead to such interesting issues not only in conducting a scholarly investigation of Gertrude, but also within the world of Shakespeare's play. The overlap of the domestic and public realms as well as issues of exteriority and interiority are evident throughout the play and would have been familiar to many women of the time, especially those with footholds within emerging guild cultures like printing and brewing.

Both Judith Bennett and Helen Smith point to the exteriority of women in the form of the physical space occupied by both the business of printing or brewing (respectively) and the domestic space occupied by workers. Though the evolving authority of guilds transformed the culture surrounding both printing and brewing, the influence of the domestic space is evident in each stage of development. Bennett points out that brewsters often used resources from their domestic lives (such as servants, money, skills) in their brewing. Bennett tells us that in the late 1300s, "the nature of a woman's household determined in part the viability of her brewing ventures...a brewster needed space to brew and space to service customers" (40-1). This space was usually

found in the living conditions of the brewster. In its infancy, brewing and serving alcohol took place within the domestic space of the home. As a result, the factors that dictated the atmosphere of the domestic space often intruded into the task of brewing.

Bennett mentions the overlap of labor and space resources for the home and the business, referencing the need for assistance in “malting the grain (or selecting and buying the malt), fetching and preparing the water, collecting fuel, tending the wort, adding seasonings, advertising the availability of her brew, and selling to customers” (41). The income of the brewster’s family would have impacted the number of servants available to help with such matters, especially since a brewster might “call on the aid of servants, who, although perhaps retained primarily for other work, might also assist in brewing” (41). The size of the brewster’s family might also play a role, along with the age of the family members and the profession of the husband. If the husband had time, he might help with some of the tasks involved in brewing, just as the children, if they were old enough, might similarly employ themselves.

The interconnectedness of the domestic sphere and the public, “business” sphere is echoed in Bennett’s own analysis of the two. Bennett writes

within brewing, all women were not the same. A married brewster in Howden more often than not worked with her husband in the trade, enjoyed the assistance of a servant or two, and lived in a comfortable household. A not-married brewster more often than not worked alone in the trade, without the help of husband or servants or even children, and she probably lived in relative poverty. (38)

Bennett’s assertions about the household are woven into her discussion of brewing. This leads the reader to recognize both the interconnectedness of domestic life with brewing and the reality that the two must be taken together to fully understand either sphere.

Smith's analysis of the printing house likewise concerns itself with the interconnectedness of household and business. In describing the social interactions taking place within printing houses, Smith points out that these took place in "what were simultaneously the most public and the most domestic spaces of the early modern households" (126). Smith goes on to say that the workplace and the home were "often part of the same building" and that investigations often "involved a disruption of domestic routine, and...intruded – sometimes violently – into household space" (126). Essentially, Smith points to the fact that the very space of the printing house and the household was, if not exactly the same, very close in proximity, often spilling over into one another. In short, the printing house was the household.

Smith also explains that women's domestic work often paid for the labor taking place in the print shops. Social visits were common, and wives frequently took over the business when the husband was out of town, which points to further involvement in the industry. A woman's involvement in business was mediated by her marital status; single women were rare in printing, though widows were more common. Still, the domestic greatly impacts the public roles. When there is trouble in a household, often the business of that family is impacted by it.

This is especially true in cases where the payment for working in a printing shop included room and board with the family. In these cases, Smith points out that the fabric of the family and the fabric of the printing house were connected (125). Smith explains that "print-house employment often involved domestic dependence...though the details of who would feed, lodge, and launder...are unclear, these tasks were 'huswives trades'" (124). Additionally Smith cites writing from Thomas Nashe about the workings of John

Danter's printing house in which "Nasche (sic) posits the domestic sphere as the intimate space of homo-social textual production: a production that occupies what were simultaneously the most public and the most domestic spaces of the early modern household" (125-6).

Many women who worked in production and selling worked in these kinds of spaces. McIntosh explains that many women sold their goods from their own homes (123). The lucky women had indoor shops to sell their goods from, but as industries came to make more and more money, women found themselves pushed out (125). The place in which women often sold their goods, then, was their household. This created an area that fell somewhere between the categories of public and domestic.

In *Hamlet*, the castle operates in a similar way. As both a home and a place of royal business, the castle reflects the complexity Habermas describes in categorizing a space as entirely "public" or "private." Different areas of the castle have varying levels of accessibility for the outside community. For example, the most personal scene for Gertrude takes place in what is labeled her "closet." The Oxford English Dictionary cites the word "closet" as having referred to "a room for privacy or retirement; a private room; an inner chamber" since the late 1300's ("closet, n."). While alternative definitions are offered, they all refer to the closet as a "private" or "secluded" space ("closet, n."). It makes sense, then, that the most personal scene for Gertrude takes place in her closet. This room of the castle, though, is not secluded. Polonius is in Gertrude's closet and when Hamlet enters, he stays hidden behind the arras to listen in on their conversation (3.4.7). This room is set up to be a secluded inner chamber of the castle, but is neither entirely public nor private.

Gertrude's royal bed is similarly complicated. The Ghost tells Hamlet not to let "the royal bed of Denmark be/A couch for luxury and damned incest" (1.5.38-83). While a bed is a seemingly private place, this is the royal bed, again merging business and private, domestic spaces. The reference to the royal bed brings up the issue of lineage. Because royalty is determined by bloodlines, it is as connected with the political sphere as it can be.

Areas of the castle that are open to the community at large are also complicated. When Gertrude first comes on stage in the first act of the play, she enters with several people. The stage directions in the Riverside edition of *Hamlet* indicate that Gertrude enters with Claudius and a council that includes Polonius, Laertes, and Hamlet, along with others, including Voltmand and Cornelius. These stage directions are amended to include Voltmand and Cornelius and remove Ophelia and "Lords Attendant" from the first folio's stage directions. The location of this scene is simply described as "the castle" (qtd in Wofford 34). The exact room of the castle is unknown, but since the group enters to "a flourish," there are clearly people playing the trumpets present and likely other people to whom they're announcing the entrance (qtd in Wofford 34). The scene, however, becomes deeply personal when Claudius, Gertrude, and Hamlet begin to talk about the death of the old king. While the scene opens with a discussion between Claudius, Cornelius, Voltmand, Laertes, and Polonius, after 65 lines the discussion shifts to be between Claudius, Gertrude, and Hamlet. The other characters, while still on the stage, fade into the background and this public area becomes the backdrop to a private family conversation, complicating the categorization of the space.

The dialogue taking place here is also a complex combination of private and public. Claudius tells Hamlet that his departure from Denmark is “most retrograde to our desire” because Hamlet is “the most immediate to our throne” (1.2.114; 1.2.109). Claudius appeals to Hamlet on a formal and political level here, concerned mainly with the exterior appearances of the royal family. His speech becomes tinged with familial relations when he tells Hamlet that he is “our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son” (1.2.117). While Claudius begins this list with “courtier” (a political role), he ends it with “son” (a filial role). For Claudius, the relationship of son is tied up with the role of prince, thereby conflating official and familial duties. Claudius’ address is followed by Gertrude’s plea that Hamlet “let not thy mother lose her prayers...stay with us” (1.2.118-119). Gertrude appeals to Hamlet as a mother in a moment that seemingly reveals her interior feelings about her son, providing another layer to the interplay of private, family affairs and public, official duties.

The fact that the story comes in the format of a play provides another layer of complexity. Even though the audience suspends disbelief in imagining the world of the play to be taking place in the space of Hamlet’s home, the reality is that it takes place in the public arena of the theatre. In an odd inversion of the business intruding on the domestic space, the play displays the personal, domestic struggles of a royal family within the very public theatre. The two spaces become tangled to the point they cannot be separated. Importantly, no matter the nature of the space, Gertrude isn’t barred from any area of the castle. The play doesn’t suggest that there are areas in which Gertrude isn’t allowed to be because she is a woman. Like printers and brewsters of the time, she physically occupies spaces that are used for official purposes as well as domestic ones.

Gertrude's position as Queen of Denmark is similarly intertwined with her domestic duties. Gertrude has a certain amount of political power in the play. When Claudius is on stage, Gertrude is always with him for public appearances. While many critics, including Rebecca Smith (*A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude*), Baldwin Maxwell ("Hamlet's Mother"), and Harmonie Loberg ("Queen Gertrude: Monarch, Mother, Murderer"), read this as Gertrude's quiet subservience to Claudius, Mary Hazard sheds light on the importance of presence and absence within the rhetoric of what she terms Elizabethan silent languages. Hazard explains that Protestant Queen Elizabeth withdrew her presence from a Catholic Mass in her domestic chapel the December preceding her January coronation; although she did so silently, this movement led to speculation over Elizabeth's future plans for religion (233). Hazard points out that "speculation is based on recognition of present/absence as a vehicle of expression, the withdrawal of her visible presence here signifying the queen's displeasure with the religious observance. The gesture was a rhetorical figure in action" (233). In this light, Gertrude's presence with Claudius suggests her support for his decisions. All of the conversations that happen within the play bent on harming Hamlet take place in the absence of the queen (3.3.1; 4.5.197; 4.7.1; 4.7.163). The audience is led to understand this is because she would never agree to such plans. We are told as much by Claudius, who indicates that the queen "lives by his [Hamlet's] looks" (4.7.11-12). While we often see Gertrude and Claudius together in the play, Gertrude's presence declines as the play progresses.

In Act 4, Claudius has multiple conversations outside of Gertrude's presence, scheming to kill Hamlet. Gertrude's absence during these conversations is indicative of

her likely resistance to any plan intended to harm her son. Gertrude's presence in other scenes points to her active support for her husband. While Gertrude certainly obeys Claudius, it is out of choice. This becomes clear in the death scene of the play when Gertrude disobeys Claudius and drinks to Hamlet.

Though moments in which Gertrude alone takes action in the play are rare, they can lead us to a better understanding of exactly what we are to imagine Gertrude does as a queen. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive, both Claudius and Gertrude greet them. While Claudius gives most of the directions and requests to them, Gertrude asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to "show us so much gentry and good will/as to expend your time with us a while/for the supply and profit of our hope" (2.2.22-4). Even though this is a simple request, it makes Gertrude an equal partner in dispatching the two of them to go and talk to Hamlet. Indeed, it is Gertrude who gives the final directions, saying "I beseech you instantly to visit/my too much changed son" (2.2.35-6). This is immediately followed by another order: "go some of you/and bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is" (2.2.36-7). Gertrude not only holds sway over Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but also has the power to issue commands to her servants or members of the court.

She also demonstrates her power over Polonius later on. Though Polonius comes to Gertrude with a suspected cause of Hamlet's madness, it is important that he addresses himself to Claudius *and* Gertrude; but it is Gertrude who leads the discussion, asking questions and even telling Polonius to speak "more matter with less art" (2.2.95). Claudius asks Gertrude whether she believes that Polonius's explanation of Hamlet's madness is correct, which suggests that Gertrude holds a certain amount of power. It's unclear whether this is a result of her position as Hamlet's mother or from her role as

queen, but Gertrude's opinion holds a certain amount of authority nonetheless. Her political power originates from both her domestic relationships with others in the play, most notably her current and former husbands and her son, and her role as queen consort. Gertrude's position as a queen affords her a certain amount of social prestige that is recognized by the community at large. The importance of her role, however, is still secondary to that of the men surrounding her. Much of her influence in the political realm results from the more inconspicuous roles she plays as the mother of the prince and the wife of the king; the power she holds as queen consort comes through her marriage to Claudius. Similar power dynamics were commonly at play for working women of the time.

Many working women, like Gertrude, had power even if it was secondary to that of the men. Despite the lack of official recognition, women's power within the field of brewing was obviously noted, a fact that the often negative stereotypes surrounding these women can attest to. Larger debates about the worth of women raised concerns about their interiority. These concerns are reflected and amplified in association with brewsters. As the business of brewing evolved and grew, the stereotypes of women who participated in that business (officially recognized or not) became proportionally more deprecating. While this is by no means a good thing, it does point to the fact that women were recognized on a public level as taking part in the business. Partly because of the negative stereotypes women faced, the domestic links brewsters were able to make impacted the success or failure of their business.

Similar happenings take place in the realm of printing. Printers' wives often took part in the running of the printing house. Smith explains that official records noted the

presence of widows in the printing business, often taking over after the death of the prior business figurehead, her husband. What Smith points to is the likelihood that “a business, as well as a marital, partnership suffered the loss of one of its key players” upon the death of a husband, pointing to partnerships that were “mercantile as well as marital” (109).

Smith points to instances when a husband would be out of town and leave the running of the business to his wife, again arguing that it’s unlikely that the wife learned to run the business overnight, but probably played a much more central role in the regular running of the printing house (112). Women married to printers often served a function within the business itself, hence the presence of widows within the trade upon the death of a husband. What this demonstrates is the interrelatedness of marital relations to roles within a business. Women were often not hired to work in a printing shop; women who worked did so because they were married to a printer (102).

This was typical for many working women. Many legal, financial, and attitudinal issues stopped many women from operating a business all on their own. For example, McIntosh explains that “so long as production remained at an intermediate level and their husbands backed their activity, women’s disabilities in the areas of obtaining credit and controlling labor were less pronounced” (39). Women were often financially at a disadvantage since men had more capital and credit. Obtaining guild membership as an independent business woman was difficult. Soliciting the custom of one’s neighbors when there were men, presumably trying to support their families, in the same business could also be problematic. Having a husband meant that women not only had a business partner, but the kind of financial backing and societal acceptability they needed to be successful in their ventures. This kind of dependent relationship is echoed in *Hamlet*.

Gertrude is able to rule as queen because she is married to King Hamlet. Upon his death, the possibility is raised that she takes a husband to maintain that position. Hamlet's comment that Claudius has "popp'd in between th' election and my hopes" testifies to the fact that Hamlet views Claudius as the familial ingredient that intercepts his own progression to the throne (5.2.65). What complicates this is the fact that Gertrude's downfall lies in her inability to successfully fulfill her roles as wife, mother, widow, and queen. If we again look to the closet scene, we can see Gertrude failing in an official capacity due to her loyalties to her son. When Hamlet stabs Polonius, she should have turned him in since she had witnessed the crime. Similarly, when she found out about Claudius's murderous act, she should have taken some kind of action to instill justice. She doesn't, though. Instead, she allows her personal interests to overcome her official responsibilities as queen consort.

Her relationships with other characters in the play reflect the complex relationship between her domestic and official duties. Gertrude is a mother, a wife, a widow, and a queen. All of Gertrude's relationships are both domestic and official. While predominately domestic roles like mother and wife might generally be considered private, for Gertrude as well as working women of the time, they were also linked with business, and thus "public" roles as well. Just as printers' wives and brewers' wives found a foothold in a business through their husbands, Gertrude's standing as queen consort is dependent upon her having a husband, making her royal status as domestic as it is official. Reflexively, neither her status as a widow nor her status as a wife is entirely domestic in nature. Furthermore, her relationship to Hamlet is both official and domestic because of her role as queen, which makes him the Prince of Denmark.

Not only do these roles overlap in their official and domestic natures, but they contradict one another as well. Each of these roles requires Gertrude to demonstrate her loyalty to the counterpart. Because Hamlet is pitted against Claudius, the murderer and brother of her former husband, at times Gertrude is forced to decide which relationship she will honor. Through Gertrude's interactions with her husband, son, and deceased husband, hints about her interiority emerge.

As a mother, we expect Gertrude to support and love her son. Jeffrey Singman explains that "parents were expected to be strict, but this was seen as a sign of love...for the first six years or so, the Elizabethan child would be at home and principally under female care" (39-40). A mother would have spent most of her time with the child as it was raised, providing both care and the initial education of manners to children. Singman points to the relationship between parents and children, explaining that "children were expected to show great respect to their parents," which is oddly lacking in Hamlet's treatment of his mother. Though he loves her, he is often intrusive and accusatory towards her. In the closet scene, Hamlet insists he is going to "set...up a glass/where [Gertrude] may see the inmost part of [herself]" (3.4.19-20). He goes on to accuse her of killing her husband and sharing her bed with his murderer and brother (3.4.28; 3.4.92-94). On the other hand, Gertrude demonstrates her love for her son in her pleadings for him to be happy and find a way to cope with the loss of his father in Act 1 Scene 2. Gertrude asks that Hamlet not "for eve with thy veiled lids/Seek for thy noble father in the dust... 'tis common, all that lives must die" (1.2.70-2). Gertrude plays the role of a mother trying to comfort her son in the grief of having lost his father. She appeals to the idea that death is universal, asking Hamlet to try and accept that his father has passed

“through nature to eternity”(1.2.73). Hamlet, however, points to Gertrude’s failure to love and value her former husband in being so quick to move beyond the grieving stage (1.2.146-159).

Hamlet tells the audience that Gertrude was a good wife to King Hamlet, remembering how “she should hang on him/As if increase of appetite had grown/By what it fed on”(1.2.143-5). Hamlet paints his mother as being entirely enamored of his father, her love for him increasing the more time she spent around him. Hamlet seems to convey Gertrude’s success in her roles of wife and mother prior to King Hamlet’s death. This quickly switches, though, when Hamlet rages that,

yet, within a month  
 –Let me not think on’t! Frailty, thy name is woman!  
 –A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
 With which she followed my poor father’s body,  
 Like Niobe, all tears –why, she, [even she]  
 –O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason  
 Would have morn’d longer –married with my uncle  
 ... Within a month,  
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
 Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
 She married – O most wicked speed: to post  
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets (1.2.145-157)

Gertrude’s successful fulfillment of the role of widow is placed right next to her failures. When Hamlet gives us the image of Gertrude crying like Niobe, it’s clear that she fulfilled the role of a grieving widow. Likely, had she not remarried, her mourning would have suited her son and avoided his scrutiny. It is only because her tears were “unrighteous” that Hamlet takes issue with her grief. All the proper grieving in the world cannot cover the mistake Gertrude makes in entering into marriage so quickly. In her haste, she fails as a widow. She not only fails to wait long enough after the death of her husband (only a month), but she also chooses for her partner the brother of the former

king. While other characters in the play speak about the speed with which Gertrude remarries, none of them (with the exception of Hamlet and the ghost, of course) seem to take issue with her choice of marriage partner. In fact, Claudius is addressing his council when he states “with mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,/In equal scale weighing delight and dole,/Taken to wife; nor have we herein barr’d/Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone/With this affair along” (1.2.12-16). The council to the king and queen seem to have shown no concern about the incestuous nature of the match. This provides a fascinating complication to the audience’s perception of Gertrude’s marriage since it is not condemned for its incestuous nature by the council, but rather by Hamlet and the Ghost. Importantly, Hamlet’s objection to his mother’s marriage is originally the haste with which she “post[s]/with such dexterity to incestious sheets” (1.2.156-7). Hamlet’s opposition to the match increases when he learns that Claudius killed his father.

In the play-within-a-play, the player queen seems to recognize that “a second time I kill my husband dead,/When second husband kisses me in bed” (3.2.172-173). The crime here seems to be that the player queen knows of her second husband’s murderous act but marries him anyway. She also decides to marry the player king only one month after the death of her husband, promising “if once I be a widow, ever I be a wife!” (3.2.143-150; 3.2.211). This play, while it reflects Hamlet’s interpretation of his mother’s remarriage, prompts no one besides Claudius to acknowledge that the play is about his own murder of the Old King Hamlet and marriage to Gertrude. While Gertrude recognizes the o’er hastiness of her marriage she never shows remorse in her choice of partner until she hears of his murderous acts, nor does she recognize the play-within-a-play as a representation of her own remarriage. Even when Gertrude learns that Claudius

killed her previous husband, we see her protecting him when Laertes tries to attack. The play seems to be pointing towards the idea that Gertrude's main flaw as a widow is having remarried too quickly.

Gertrude's marriage not only offends her deceased husband, but also causes strife in her relationship with her son. The play seems to leave the possibility open that Gertrude's remarriage could have been motivated by a desire to maintain her political position of queen consort. Margarita de Grazia suggests this in her work *Hamlet without Hamlet*. De Grazia states that "the play's earliest audience might well have been surprised to find that kingship had passed to the king's brother rather than to his son and namesake...it is time for Hamlet to rule but it is Claudius who is made king" (86). It is clear that ruling Denmark was Hamlet's hope, at least. By marrying Claudius, Gertrude has made intimate ties with the individual who won out in the election against her son for King of Denmark. Though Hamlet places the blame for this on Claudius by pinpointing him as the man who took his place on the throne (5.2.65), Gertrude's marriage helped to solidify his role as the new king (de Grazia 107). What's more, Gertrude continues to upset Hamlet by doting upon her new husband so shortly after the death of the old king. Gertrude's attentions are divided, causing her to fall short in both the realm of mothering and being a wife.

This is clearly seen in Act 4, Scene 5 when Laertes first learns of his father's death. Laertes storms into the scene, demanding that Claudius relinquish his father. When Claudius tells Laertes that his father is dead, Gertrude exclaims "but not by him" (4.5.128). In this moment, Gertrude has unwittingly betrayed her son. Though she likely had no intention of redirecting Laertes's wrath upon Hamlet, in protecting her husband,

she does so. Gertrude acts as a good wife in this scene, demonstrating her loyalty to Claudius. The result is the betrayal of her son and her failure as a mother, which ultimately contributes to Hamlet's death in the end.

Ironically, it is Gertrude's loyalty to Hamlet that causes her death at the end of the play. In Act 5, Scene 2, Gertrude toasts her son's fortune. Before she drinks the alcohol, though, Claudius cries out "Gertrude, do not drink" (5.2.272). Gertrude, refusing to follow the command of her husband, tells him "I will, my lord, I pray you pardon me" (5.2.273). Though she asks for her husband's pardon and acknowledges his order, Gertrude still drinks from the poisoned cup meant for Hamlet. In doing so, she certainly succeeds as a mother, supporting her son's efforts and demonstrating her support of him. Simultaneously, she fails in her role as a wife. She disobeys her husband and, despite the fact that she begs his pardon, her disobedience results in her death. Her last words are directed towards her son. She cries out "the drink, the drink – O my dear Hamlet –/the drink, the drink! I am pois'ned" (5.2.291-2). Gertrude's last words serve to warn her son of the treachery taking place. Her last act is a fulfillment of her motherly role: protecting her son. At the same time, it demonstrates some rejection of the role of wife since she has ultimately refused Claudius' order.

Any act Gertrude commits within the play leads to a straying from one role and a fulfillment of another. Gertrude remarries, which allows her to maintain her public role. In remarrying, though, her domestic roles—especially her role as Hamlet's mother—become far more complex and impossible to fulfill successfully. Action causes betrayal. Inaction causes betrayal. As the common thread between all of the characters in the play, Gertrude's every move tugs at the fabric of the play's action. When she dies and is

removed from the story, so is every other male character connected to her. Gertrude's death reveals the treachery of her husband and Laertes. Laertes cries "Thy mother's pois'ned./I can no more – the King, the King's to blame" (5.2.301-2). Gertrude's death prompts Laertes to betray the king. Claudius is then killed by Hamlet, who cries "here, thou incestuous, [murd'rous], damned Dane,/Drink [off] this potion! Is [thy union] here?/Follow my mother!" (5.2.307-9). Gertrude bookends Hamlet's speech. He begins by citing Claudius's incestuous relationship with his mother, buries the accusation of Claudius murdering the king (presumably the reason for revenge) in the middle of the speech, and then ends by reconnecting Claudius with Gertrude in death. When Claudius is killed, Laertes dies, followed quickly by Hamlet.

Despite Gertrude's inability to fulfill all of her roles, her entire claim to the public realm lies in her decisions within the private. She backs her husband, Claudius; therefore, her choice in marriage partners bleeds into the kind of rule taking place in Denmark, which in turn is often embroiled in notably private affairs such as the thwarted romance between Hamlet and Ophelia. Gertrude only gets to fulfill the role of queen consort if she is also a wife of a king. Gertrude's position in the royal family is dependent upon and secondary to that of the royal men around her. This was a society-wide phenomenon. Women were simply secondary to men, something exemplified in the roles of working women and men in the same trade.

Women's most active roles in the business of brewing tended to be mainly as labor. Bennett tells us that

in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, married women had worked more than singlewomen (sic) and widows as by-industrial brewers because their domestic situations, their work patterns, and their access to small amounts of capital offered important advantages. As brewing slowly expanded after the Black

Death, the first two advantages waned in importance. By the fifteenth century, some urban brewers were working in brewhouses, not homes, and they were following their trade as an occupation, not as a by-industry juggled with other duties. (55-6)

Bennett traces a history in which women once brewed ale as a side job, a side job that worked well for earning extra family income because women were better able to make time for the jobs that needed to be done in brewing. In short, brewing was a domestic activity. As the demand for alcohol increased and brewing became a larger-scale operation, the industry passed into the hands of men and subsequently became a public enterprise, governed by a guild. The changing jobs women were allowed to occupy within the field sent a clear message: “women’s economic activities were seen as secondary to those of men” (McIntosh 7).

For brewsters in the early centuries of brewing, brewing was a side-job entirely determined by the home situation...time, money, servants, etc. As brewing becomes more industrial, though, some of the factors carry over. Indeed, different domestic factors replaced the previous ones. Women now had to look to issues like servants and marital status. The domestic was hopelessly tangled with the public, interiority with exteriority. This was especially clear in the emerging regulations.

Habermas explains that with an increase of public regulation that adopts the “interests of civil society as its own,” the result is that “the interventions by public power in the affairs of private people transmitted impulses that indirectly grew out of the latter’s own sphere” (142). In other words, the two spheres grow from one another. As the private or previously unregulated spheres grow to require regulation, as we will see in the worlds of brewing and printing, the public sphere is shaped by the private needs of the public, thereby melding the two together.

Bennett describes the increased regulations as brewing moved from a personal business to a guild in which rules became necessary. Bennett explains that many of the official conventions for brewing began with the assize of ale, which was firmly regulating the brewing trade by 1300. Bennett explains that

after 1350, many communities began to monitor brewers even more closely...by 1500, some communities had extended their supervision still further, trying to regulate the supply of ale...and trying to constrain disruptive alehouses...these measures were expanded in 1552 with a statute establishing clear procedures for licensing alesellers that endured...for centuries. (100-107)

What this demonstrates, for both Bennett and Habermas, is the conflation of private and public realms. While brewing was largely a household activity, as the business grew, the public regulations reflect the anxieties within the society surrounding women. Bennett explains that what these regulations demonstrate is “a division of the world into householders, on the one hand, and their numerous dependents, on the other; and the belief that women were naturally more disobedient, disorderly, and disruptive than men” (121). Bennett attributes this to the patriarchal systems prevalent throughout early modern England, which place men as the head of the household, dividing them from women, the dependents. As Jeffrey Singman observes, “women, like horses and servants, were expected to be in a position of subordination” (17-8). This subordination is presumably to a man: “a girl would exchange subordination to her father for subordination to an employer or her husband” (Singman 17-18). As brewing became more prosperous, women who brewed increasingly encroached upon an economic field that was “organized around men” (Singman 30). Such an encroachment represented a threat to the expected system of patriarchy, which in turn led male authorities to articulate still more specific regulations seeking to control, contain, or exclude women from access

to communal power and influence (Singman 101). In the case of *Hamlet*, we have another patriarchal system, this time within a family, under siege.

While Gertrude's previous marriage represents a patriarchal system that appears to be acceptable to all, her new marriage to Claudius posits him as the new head patriarch. Gertrude attempts to uphold the new hierarchy repeatedly. In the first act of the play, Gertrude and Claudius ask Hamlet to stay in Denmark with them, which he does to appease his mother (1.2.115-120). Gertrude goes so far as to refer to Claudius as Hamlet's father, telling him "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended" to which Hamlet replies "Mother you have my father much offended" (3.4.9-10). Gertrude sets up a patriarchal family hierarchy and Hamlet rejects it. As the two continue speaking, Hamlet attempts to control, if not Gertrude's inward feelings towards Claudius, at the very least her exterior interactions with him.

Though the ghost commands Hamlet to avenge his wrongful death, the actual language the ghost uses isn't entirely clear. The ghost tells Hamlet "the serpent that did sting thy father's life/Now wears his crown...Let not the royal bed of Denmark be/A couch for luxury and damned incest" (1.5.38-83). It's evident that old King Hamlet wants his son to avenge the wrong that's been done to him, yet that injustice seems to be twofold. Not only was his life prematurely taken in an effort to gain power, but Claudius' means for attaining that power also lead him to commit incest. King Hamlet cries for his son not to let "the royal bed of Denmark" be soiled.

Thus, Hamlet's project is not only to avenge his father's death, but to control his mother's actions. This is both an interior/exterior and public/business problem taking place in the context of simultaneously private and personal space (the royal bed). Hamlet

expects to take the throne, claiming that Claudius is the cause of the strife and has “popp’d in between th’ election and my hopes” (5.2.65). If Hamlet believes Claudius is guilty of taking his throne, Hamlet’s discomfort with his mother’s interior feelings towards Claudius seems to become a greater source of strife for him. In chastising her in the closet scene, Hamlet attempts to regulate Gertrude’s private, domestic interactions with Claudius in an effort to debunk the new patriarchal system imposed by her new marriage.

The personal nature of Hamlet’s complaints against his mother seem to be reflected in the ways Hamlet refers to her throughout the play. When Hamlet references his mother, he refers to her as mother, wife, or woman. King Hamlet, however, he often refers to as king, my father the king, or the king my father. A good example of this is when Hamlet refers to King Claudius as the man who “hath kill’d my king and whor’d my mother” (5.4.64). While we understand that “my king” refers to Hamlet’s father and that “my mother” refers to the current queen of Denmark, the terms he chooses to attach to each parental figure both pulls forward the heinousness of Claudius’s crime and throws light on the way we are supposed to view these characters within the context of the play. Hamlet’s father clearly gains his power and influence from his previously held seat on the throne, which is largely external. For Hamlet, his father is referenced as the prior King of Denmark first and foremost. This is echoed in the earlier closet scene when Hamlet convinces his mother that her crime lies in murdering a king and marrying his brother (3.4.28). Hamlet doesn’t accuse his mother of murdering her husband but a king. It isn’t until Hamlet chastises her for her sexual relations with Claudius that he refers to King Hamlet as her husband. In making this shift, Hamlet also makes the shift from chastising

Gertrude for her exterior actions to her interior feelings about Claudius and the former king.

In perhaps the most telling moment of the play, Gertrude displays her interiority by drinking the poisoned drink meant for Hamlet. Abigail Montgomery views this as Gertrude taking agency and moving away from Claudius's rule, arguing that throughout the play, there are moments (such as the closet scene) in which Gertrude is "preparing to challenge Claudius outright and embark upon...death" (100). Montgomery explains that in drinking to Hamlet's success, Gertrude "moves from outright defiance of Claudius to death" (113). If we are to see Gertrude as having agency in moving away from her husband, as Montgomery suggests, one possible explanation might be that Gertrude's interior feelings about Claudius have shifted, especially since the moments Montgomery points to in her article where Gertrude rebels against Claudius are all preceded by moments of enlightenment and information that change her perception of him. In this final moment, despite the fact that Gertrude bows graciously to Claudius before drinking, she disobeys her husband's command. She chooses her son over her new king.

From the beginning of the play, Gertrude is set up to clash with the patriarchal values of the political sphere. By occupying a position that is publicly recognized as holding a certain amount of official power, Gertrude goes against the grain of the patriarchal values that hold men at the center of society. The ambiguous nature of Gertrude's role in the play finds analogues in the nature of the position occupied by brewers' and printers' wives. Divisions between personal space and publicly accessible space, domestic relationships and official duties, and exterior actions and interiority highlight the dangers and opportunities working women possessed. The regulations

implemented over brewsters and printers and the attempts from Hamlet to regulate his mother's actions and interior nature result from commonly held conceptions about the interiority of women.

### CHAPTER THREE: MAKING AND BREAKING STEREOTYPES

The uneasy position working women held in early modern England attracted widespread anxiety about their trustworthiness. This chapter concerns itself with the interiority of working women as it was perceived by society at large. Fears about cheating customers, seducing individuals, and breaking the regulations set forth by the guilds all contributed to existing stereotypes about women, compounding anxieties about working women. Much scholarship surrounding Gertrude echoes with similar unease surrounding the interiority of her character. Scholars like Rachel Smith, Richard Levin, and Harmonie Loberg want to know if Gertrude is a lustful character, whether her marriage was a calculated move to maintain power and control in Denmark, and what her role in her husband's death actually was. Shakespeare raises these questions in the text only to resist giving us the answers, which forces viewers to examine Gertrude for themselves. By exploring the stereotypes surrounding working women alongside the ways in which Gertrude does and does not fulfill them, this chapter aims to explore Shakespeare's use of the tensions between public and private, exterior and interior as they manifest themselves in the character Gertrude.

Two stereotypes emerge from early modern England – that of the good woman and that of the bad. Tim Stretton's work *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* explores the ways in which women presented themselves in court as a basis for understanding society's perception of women. What emerges is the tendency to view

personal morality in the antithetical extremes of good and bad with no middle ground (Stretton 189-90). Women worked to present an exterior that reflected the qualities of a “good” interior. In the examination of women presenting cases against their husbands, Stretton explains that both parties “sought to show how their own conduct conformed to standards of acceptable behavior, and how their opponent’s conduct fell short of these standards” (189-90). The case of Katherine and Kenelm Willoughby demonstrates the meticulous crafting of an exterior representation for the larger community and the ways it reflects ideas about interiority. Kenelm portrays Katherine as “the very antithesis of a model wife. According to his depiction, she was outspoken, disloyal, extravagant and so sexually incontinent that she resembled a common prostitute...Katherine remained a dangerous, independent woman to whom it would be reckless for the Masters to grant maintenance” (Stretton 189). As the husband in the case, Kenelm attempts to craft a representation of Katherine that would suggest interior flaws. He does this by charging her with the crimes of sexual incontinence and a refusal to obey her husband. Stretton’s analysis indicates that these combined with independence would make Katherine a dangerous woman in the eyes of the court masters.

On the other hand, Katherine presented herself as “a model wife, one who had loved and respected her husband and blessed him with money and children...Kenelm, meanwhile, was a base rogue” (188). While interiority is treated by Maus as largely invisible, Katherine seems to be talking about the interiority of both herself and Kenelm. While Katherine presents her actions as a model wife who produces money and children, she also refers to her love and respect for her husband, things that are ultimately impossible to prove. She also presents Kenelm in a highly negative light, suggesting that

his roguishness goes beyond action and into his very nature. Though interiority cannot be seen, Katherine treats her actions within the marriage as results of her interior virtues (Stretton 188). Kenelm, on the other hand, is presented as an abusive husband who wouldn't allow her to leave. Neither party attempted to simply win the case at hand, but rather aimed to "demonstrate, by weight of example, that the other party had a deep-seated immoral propensity, and an incurable 'criminal streak'" (Stretton 189). Not only did Katherine and Kenelm attempt to present status attributes to the court, they attempted to use those exterior characteristics to demonstrate a flawed, even dangerous interiority. The interest of both parties lay in making a statement to the community about the true nature of the other as it emerged in personal interactions away from society's eye, again melding the private with the public.

As a queen, Gertrude also finds herself in the middle of the spectrum between "public" and "private." Gertrude's relationships to Hamlet, Claudius, and the Ghost are all on display because they are all political as well. She is the queen to two of Denmark's Kings, both the present and his predecessor, and the royal mother of the prince. As such, her actions towards each character are viewed by the community as potentially indicative of her inward nature. While Gertrude's marriage to Claudius has led scholars to examine her sexuality, the added benefit of maintaining political power could not have gone unnoticed by the audience. Gertrude's marriage presents several possible meanings for her interiority. It could be that marrying Claudius was simply a ploy to maintain her social status as queen consort, in which case she would be inwardly greedy. This may well be what causes Gertrude such pain in the closet scene where Hamlet chastises her for her interactions with Claudius. Perhaps the "black and grained spots" that Gertrude

sees on her soul are the result of her lust for status. The hasty nature of her marriage and the suspicion on Hamlet's part that she might have been involved in the murder of King Hamlet all point to the ambiguous nature of Gertrude's interiority in the play. The fact that it is Hamlet scolding her and not his father also complicates her culpability as it is Hamlet who loses the throne, possibly as a result of (among other factors) Gertrude's remarriage. This decision makes Hamlet angry for the wrong done to his father, but he is clearly angry about the political power he has lost out on as well, as we will see in the next chapter. Ironically, Hamlet doesn't accuse his mother of a greed for power. This is an inversion of the kind of treatment working women received. While often the woman was viewed as the perpetrator of a crime against the inwardly honest and good man, Gertrude here avoids culpability in Hamlet's eyes. Instead, it's Claudius who is supposed to be inwardly greedy for power.

The desire for power is one of the most interesting stereotypes that surround working women in early modern England. In the printing business, women were often viewed as less easily ruled than men and rarely went into business on their own. Helen Smith reveals that Pollard's *Short-title Catalogue* "reveals a common pattern: women are listed as printers or booksellers only after their husbands' deaths...the pattern of women's appearance in the records upon the death of their spouses reveals the generational structures of the trade. Widows regularly inherited their husbands' businesses" (H. Smith 102-3). While the majority of women involved in the printing industry were widows or wives of master printers, Smith does reference two women who worked as printers on their own. Smith explains that in 1637, a Star Chamber decree established a limit of twenty master printers in London. Smith tells us that "a letter from 1637 survives, on the

back of which Sir John Lambe noted candidates for the twenty available places, apparently drawing on a list of existing master printers...the two women whose names appear in Lambe's document, Mary Dawson and Anne Griffin, were not included in the approved list" (117). According to this quotation, two women were master printers prior to the year 1637. Upon the decree that there be only twenty master printers in the town of London, the already small and marginalized women printers found themselves pushed out of the industry. Although Smith clearly states that Dawson and Griffin were not rejected solely based upon their gender, the fact that male members of the women's family were deemed suitable for the positions indicates that gender did play a role. Smith goes on to state that "there is scarce evidence to suggest that the Company was concerned about the prospect of a widow running a printing business, although the records do, on occasion, attest to 'a certain wariness about the activities of women'" (120). There are certainly cases, such as those of Jacqueline Vautrollier and Anne Griffin, where women flirted with or even outright broke the regulations set forward, publishing material that was ordered to remain unpublished. These are the cases where the "wariness about the activities of women" Smith refers to took center stage. In this, a similar pattern to that of brewsters emerges where women are saddled with suspicion about their interior natures due to the actions of only a few within the business. Often, in printing, this suspicion centered around the unruliness of women.

McIntosh explains that there was a general unease about all working women. The disadvantages women already faced in the areas of credit, controlling labor, and traveling were "heightened by intensified social, political, and cultural discomfort about women. Worry about disorder and sexual wrongdoing led to closer supervision of female behavior

by local courts...it is clear that women, their work, their sexuality, and their speech were charged issues” (41). As industries bloomed, the anxieties held about women were reflected in the regulations of those businesses.

Bennett highlights the tension caused by women’s place in the growing field of brewing, but the anxieties about brewsters’ interior natures extended beyond that of unruliness. In a patriarchal system where men occupy most positions of political or economic power, women who exercised such power caused unease. Bennett explains that women who took on business roles as a result of the industrialization of brewing were viewed as “naturally more disobedient, disorderly, and disruptive than men” (121). This is particularly poignant in Bennett’s examination of brewsters when she explains that “cultural representations of brewsters were deeply ambivalent; brewsters offered their customers good fun and good drink, but they also tempted people into sin, cheated their customers in devious ways, brewed unhealthy and disgusting drink, and ran disorderly establishments” (11). Certainly there were instances in which customers received bad drink, were cheated or tempted into sin, or found themselves in an establishment that wasn’t up to par. Bennett explains that “it seems that public anxieties about the drink trade – its resistance to effective regulation, its encouragement of vice, its manipulation of the public – were displaced from all brewers onto female brewers alone” (11-12). Because of this transfer of all anxieties about the drink trade to women brewers only, brewsters didn’t have much of a chance at representing themselves as inwardly good. This meant that the roles of working women were regarded in ambiguous ways; on the one hand, these women functioned as necessary productive forces within their occupations, but on the other, they were often saddled with the full weight of the

apprehensions surrounding their vocation. Brewsters were subjected not only to the criticism surrounding the trades in which they worked, but also faced anxieties about women in general. This is especially clear in the stereotype of brewsters as licentious.

In one ballad titled “The Spendthrift’s Recantation,” the singer tells the tale of a man who foolishly spends his money at the alehouse while his wife and children starve. The depiction of the alewife in this ballad is strikingly horrifying. We are told that the man would go to the alehouse to visit his “Hostess,” the alewife. The ballad explains that she “saw my money was plenty,” which led her to cheat the customer; “If I said fill a Flagon/She set two upon the score/She slaber’d and kis’t and sate on my Knee, A Pox on her then for a Whore” (“Spendthrift’s Recantation”). This excerpt demonstrates the very stigmas that Bennett references. The alewife in this ballad cheats her customer by providing him with more alcohol than he intends to purchase and goes on to demonstrate her sexual deviation by slobbering, kissing, and sitting on the knee of the spendthrift. This image of the alehouse is not an appealing one. Her sexuality is treated as a disgusting thing, especially with the word “slaber’d.”

As the ballad continues, even more pointed discussion about the interiority of the alewife emerges. When the spendthrift becomes ill, “never an Alewife in my need/Would come within my door” (“Spendthrift’s Recantation”). When the narrator finally hits rock bottom and humbles himself to ask the alewife for money, “she deny’d me like a Whore” (“Spendthrift’s Recantation”). This is the second time the narrator refers to the Alewife as a “Whore,” once more placing her unchaste behavior as a central concern for the spendthrift. The conclusion of the ballad sees the narrator promising “If ever I do get money again,/I will save some in Store/And keep a better House & Cloaths on our

backs/I will never live so poor” (“Spendthrift’s Recantation”). The narrator presents such a sad image of himself – poor, starving and ill – that when the alewife refuses him, she appears all the more inwardly immoral.

In the ballad “Wades Reformation,” a similar tale unfolds. A man visits the alehouse and is seduced to spend more time and more money than he has on the brewster. The narrator explains that the brewster treats him nicely “for they knew that I would see it paid” (“Wades Reformation”). This ballad echoes “The Spendthrift’s Recantation” with the narrator’s insistence that when he asks for one drink “she’d swears there was three...if they reckon’d but six I’d pay seven” (“Wade’s Reformation”). In this ballad, the hostess has her daughter seduce the man by sitting in his lap in a fine silk dress. Both the brewster and her daughter take part in taking the man’s money; the brewster procures her daughter to sexually satisfy the man, likely for another charge. The narrator explains that the daughter stayed with him until he had lost his “money and wit” and then “what I of her did then require,/She granted to me my hearts desire,/Then into a Parlour went I and she” (“Wade’s Reformation”). This narrator, like the spendthrift, loses his money and when he returns to the brewster in dire straits, “she straightwayes thrust me out of Door,/Begon quoth she you fancy jack/Then she pul’d my Coat from off my back,/This is all the comfort I got from she” (“Wade’s Reformation”). This alewife not only turns the narrator away, but takes the clothes off of his back, sending him out into the cold.

The ballad concludes with a warning “take not an Alewife for thy friend/Lest she deceive thee in the end./Repose no confidence in them/That had rather see you sink than swim” (“Wade’s Reformation”). In this final twist, the brewster undergoes perhaps the harshest criticism yet. The accusation leveled against her here is that she not only steals,

but enjoys doing so. She is attributed with the same kind of interior “criminal streak” Katherine and Kenelm attempted to push on one another. Again, the narrator warns newcomers about the wily ways of the dishonest brewster and, this time, her temptress daughter, too.

The language used to discuss Gertrude within the context of *Hamlet* resonates with these same heavy implications. Rebecca Smith points out that Gertrude “is a stimulus for and object of violent emotional reactions in the ghost, Hamlet, and Claudius, all of whom offer extreme depictions of her” (80). The ghost spends most of his monologue in Act 1, Scene 5 discussing Gertrude’s sexual indiscretion. The ghost explains his murder to Hamlet, concluding with the lines “If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not,/Let not the royal bed of Denmark be/A couch for luxury and damned incest./But howsomever thou pursues this act,/Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive/Against thy mother aught” (1.5.81-86). These lines demonstrate the ghost's preoccupation with Gertrude's marriage to Claudius. Although the ghost seems to be asking Hamlet to avenge his death, he does so in a way that Hamlet is actually seeking revenge against Claudius for seducing and marrying King Hamlet’s wife. These lines put Gertrude's sexuality at the forefront of the play's plot. They also place her as susceptible to the weaknesses of women, though King Hamlet immediately insists that Gertrude not be harmed or thought less of by her son. Even so, he acknowledges that Gertrude will be left “to heaven,/And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge/To prick and sting her” (1.5.86-8). Although Gertrude isn't being punished outright for her marriage, the ghost imagines that she will be tormented by her own conscience. The Ghost’s speculations about Gertrude’s interiority offer complexity to her character. Clearly Gertrude is guilty for

marrying Claudius, though exactly which virtues she has broken remains unclear. Despite this, the Ghost credits Gertrude with an inward feeling of guilt about her actions. This makes it difficult to view Gertrude as simply a reflection of stereotypes surrounding women in Early Modern England. The caricatures found in ballads are never described as feeling remorse. Rather, they carry on as usual and seem incapable of repentance. In this way, Gertrude provides an image of the interiority of women that is neither entirely good nor entirely bad, but rather somewhere in the middle, presumably closer to the interiority of the real-life printers and brewsters of her time.

A similar thing happens when Gertrude marries Claudius so quickly after the death of her husband. This decision leads to paranoia about the insatiable nature of Gertrude's libido. This is brought to the forefront along with the "violent emotional reactions" of other characters, as they are described by Rebecca Smith. Smith notes that Hamlet's "violent emotions toward his mother are obvious from his first soliloquy, in which twenty-three of the thirty-one lines express his anger and disgust at what he perceives to be Gertrude's weakness, insensitivity, and, most important, bestiality" (80). Both Hamlet and the Ghost focus on Gertrude's sexual deviancy. Stephen Greenblatt eloquently addresses this when he states that Hamlet's "sick imagination broods on the bed, as he conjures up an obscene scenario of domestic intimacy in which his amorous uncle coaxes from his mother his secret: that he is only feigning madness" ("With Dirge" 35). This melds the view of women as gossips into the view of women as bestial and sexual beings. Again, this posits Gertrude as the prototypical insatiable lover, but it is problematized by the text.

Rachel Smith points out that “Gertrude’s brief speeches include references to honor, virtue, flowers, and dove’s golden couplets; neither structure nor content suggests wantonness...Gertrude’s actions are as solicitous and unascivious as her language” (82). It is interesting that while Smith reads Gertrude as entirely innocent of promiscuity, obsessions from Hamlet and the ghost over Gertrude’s incest are a recurring theme within the play. As such, we see the anxieties surrounding sexually promiscuous women and the threat they pose to men. Shakespeare doesn’t present such a cut and dried view of Gertrude’s actions, though. He complicates the perpetrator-victim paradigm by placing Claudius rather than Gertrude as the target of Hamlet’s revenge.

Examined in another light, it may be that Gertrude is positioned in the play as both the subject and the object of sexual desire. She is treated as an object by Hamlet in his revulsion at her submission to Claudius’ dark desires, and this is echoed in the ghost’s description of Gertrude’s falling prey to Claudius’ wooing. There is also an undercurrent, however, of her own agency in the situation, providing brief glimpses into her interiority. When the ghost refers to Gertrude as his “seemingly virtuous queen,” he is pointing to a flaw within Gertrude. By using the word “seemingly” in that line, Shakespeare leads the audience to view Gertrude as somehow culpable in her interactions with Claudius, which results in seeing her as a subject of sexual desire, the subject of a desire for power, or as an individual whose interiority and exteriority do not match. It is her desire for Claudius and her agency in acting on it that leaves her in a position of guilt.

Gertrude is a member of the political community, and this fact cannot be ignored. She is positioned at the center of the play, present in most of the scenes in which we see Claudius, and maintains her political power until the end of the story when she dies.

When the norms or assumptions that society is based on are called into question, the boat gets rocked, which leads to the volatility of the subject. Gertrude does just this because her position as a queen and the centrality of her sexuality to the play force the audience to consider her as both a sexual and a political being. At times, her political power is even called into being by her sexual relationship to men in the play. Hamlet tries to marginalize his mother by focusing on the nature of her sexual relationship with Claudius as something alien and unnatural. This leads him, to an extent, to oppress his mother in the closet scene. He chastises her for her sexual immorality and then goes on to tell her that she has failed further in marrying the murderer of the former king (3.4.63-65). Were Gertrude to ignore Hamlet's upbraiding, she might fit more easily into the role of evil woman, but this doesn't happen.

We get more pointed insight into Gertrude's interiority through her relationships with Claudius, Hamlet, and the Ghost. In the closet scene, Hamlet spends thirty-five lines chastising his mother for her ill discretion in marrying Claudius, the murderer of her former husband. In this onslaught, Hamlet exclaims "sense sure you have,/else could you not have motion, but sure that sense/is apoplex'd, for madness would not err,/nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd/but it reserv'd some quantity of choice/to serve in such a difference" (3.4.71-76). In his inability to understand Gertrude's sense, or lack thereof, Hamlet turns to madness to explain the actions of his mother. Hamlet refers to "eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,/ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all" (3.4.78-79). This confusion of the senses points to the unruliness of Gertrude. Furthermore, Hamlet cries out to his mother "what devil was't/that thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?" (3.4.76-7). Perhaps, though, it isn't that Gertrude is blind to the

interpretation Hamlet takes in regard to his mother's marriage, but rather that she looks at it in another way. In going against the wishes of Hamlet, Gertrude proves herself unruly, which Hamlet then blames on madness. At the end of his remonstrance, Hamlet complains that "reason panders will" (3.4.8). Here, Hamlet points to an inversion of the behavior he expects from his mother. Instead of allowing reason to dissipate desire, Hamlet suggests that reason has led Gertrude to this very desire. Gertrude's reaction is compelling, as she cries that Hamlet is forcing her to "turn'st my [eyes into my very] soul,/And there I see such black and [grained] spots/And will [not] leave their tinct" (3.4.89-91). While there's no way to know whether Gertrude truly means these lines or simply uses them as a defense from her out-of-control son, but there is certainly material enough to suggest that they reflect an interiority Gertrude struggles to come to terms with. On one hand, these are the words Hamlet wants her to say, and perhaps by stating these lines she believes she's saving herself from a fate like Polonius'. On the other hand, these lines come right after Hamlet accuses her of lusting after Claudius. It is not until after Gertrude articulates these feelings of guilt that Hamlet turns to speak to the Ghost, seen only by himself, causing Gertrude to voice her belief that "Alas, he's mad!" (3.4.105). Whether she holds this thought in the back of her mind before finally voicing it is impossible to know, but it's certainly possible that her pronunciation of guilt holds some authenticity.

In his first speech in the play, the Ghost of Old Hamlet describes Claudius's wooing of Gertrude thus: "Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,/with witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts -/...won to his shameful lust/the will of my most seeming virtuous queen" (1.5.41-6). Here, the ghost inverts the typical seducer-seduced pattern

previously discussed in the space of this paper, placing Gertrude (the woman) as the victim of Claudius's (the man's) "shameful lust." Furthermore, he presents us with an image of Gertrude as a "bad" wife, disloyal and unfaithful to her prior husband. Again, I call attention to the fact that the implementation of the word "seeming" before "virtuous" suggests the fallibility of Gertrude and her loyalty as well as the disconnect between a person's interiority and exteriority. Later on in the play, we see this reappear when Gertrude refuses to listen to Claudius before drinking from the poisoned cup. She tells the audience, "The Queen carouses to thy fortune Hamlet" and starts to drink. When Claudius tells her "do not drink," Gertrude responds with "I will, my lord, I pray you pardon me" (5.2.271, 273, 274). Gertrude consumes the poisoned alcohol and is doomed to die. Her contradictory relationships leave her unable to exist within the male system; thus, she removes herself from it. R. Smith explains, "Gertrude's death is symbolic of the internal disharmony caused by her divided loyalties" (85). Gertrude's character moves across the boundaries of "good" and "bad" too easily and too frequently to be categorized clearly into either. She never stays in one column for long. In doing this, Shakespeare challenges the very stereotypes he employs, forcing his audience to make sense of a character who, very much like the contemporaries of her time, doesn't fit clearly into the typical moral classifications.

It's clear that Gertrude loves both Hamlet and Claudius. Greenblatt explains that when Claudius tells Gertrude to leave "when he is setting about to spy on Hamlet...she happily complies, for they are clearly one in their concern" and that later on, when Laertes attempts to attack Claudius, "Gertrude must...physically restrain the enraged Laertes, since Claudius twice says 'Let him go, Gertrude.' To Laertes's demand 'Where's

my father?’ Claudius forthrightly answers, ‘Dead’; whereupon Gertrude immediately adds, ‘But not by him.’” (“With Dirge” 34-5). Here, Gertrude’s passive nature is called into question. By physically restraining Laertes, Gertrude highly complicates our view of her. The audience no longer only suspects, but fully realizes Gertrude’s ability to be a physical character. While her actions thus far in the play have been highly subservient, this scene allows us to see how much Gertrude loves Claudius – enough to take action when it is required to protect him. This also suggests that her interior nature is protective of those she cares for.

This scene also points to the impossibility of Gertrude’s situation in the play. Clearly, her insistence that Laertes’s father was not killed by her husband points to her love for, and desire to protect, him. Gertrude cannot fulfill her wifely duties, it would seem, without failing in her duties as a mother. Greenblatt goes on to point out that in directing the wrath of Laertes away from her husband,

Gertrude is directing the murderous Laertes’s rage...toward someone else: Polonius’s actual murderer, Prince Hamlet. To be sure, she is not directly contriving to have her beloved son killed. Claudius is probably not lying when he explains to Laertes that he cannot move against Hamlet directly because ‘the queen his mother/Lives almost by his looks.’ ‘And for myself,’ he adds, in a remarkable confession of love that seems no less true for being rhetorically calculated. (“With Dirge” 34-5)

This excerpt further complicates the relationships within which Gertrude tries to function. She cannot possibly be successful in all of her roles within the play, especially when they come into direct conflict with one another. Additionally, Greenblatt points to the intense, if still mystifying, relationship between Gertrude and Claudius. Greenblatt writes, “the core of Gertrude and Claudius’s (relationship) is an enigma, a set of trick mirrors” (“With Dirge” 34). He continues, “virtually all the questions center on Gertrude...the play teases

us with many possible answers, all of which it withholds” (“With Dirge” 34). With his “trick mirrors” and “withheld answers,” Shakespeare has crafted Gertrude as a character that needs to be questioned and examined in order to be fully understood (“With Dirge” 34). Her role as a queen forces the audience to recognize her power as a political figure, something that again highlights the more public and official side of her identity.

Gertrude functions as an extremely complex character in *Hamlet*, largely because of the fact that she takes questionable action throughout the play, complicating the audience’s perception of her inward nature. Shakespeare resists the classification of Gertrude as a bad woman by hinting at the goodness of her interiority. In the most intimate and reflective moments, Gertrude is presented as a tormented character. She cannot reconcile her actions with her inner self all the time. Gertrude is clearly a loving mother and wife, but the love she shows to her new husband leads the audience to question the morality of her relationship with him. The fact that Claudius is the murderer of King Hamlet and that Gertrude chose to marry him, unknowingly as it must have been, sets her up to be viewed in a questionable light. Her decisions to obey Hamlet and Claudius both lead her to be unruly toward the other, placing her in yet another uneasy situation. Despite the questionable nature of Gertrude’s interiority, her inner nature is ambiguous enough that it’s just as impossible to convict Gertrude of embodying any one stereotype as it is to prove her innocence. In crafting Gertrude to be such a slippery character, Shakespeare not only ensures that the plot moves forward, but also forces audiences to examine the fallibility of stereotypes and the complex inward nature of the women perceived to embody them. This may also be an appeal to Shakespeare’s

working-class audience, suggesting the possible truth behind the anxieties surrounding working women without condemning them by treating those anxieties as entirely true.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ISSUES OF REMARRIAGE

This chapter offers an in-depth analysis of Gertrude's marriage to Claudius. It offers an application of common ideas surrounding remarriage as well as an examination of the benefits, drawbacks, and conditions of remarriage for brewsters and printers in particular. The considerations involved in remarriage are presented on a scale, ranging from personal and household to official. This scale is also applied to Gertrude's marriage to Claudius, ranging from more personal and invisible considerations to more political and visible factors.

Akiko Kusunoki explains that early seventeenth-century England saw a change in society's attitudes towards widows' remarriage (170). Kusunoki identifies the common perception of a good widow in the late sixteenth-century as "a person who preserves her husband's ideal image after his death" (173). Gertrude does not fall into this classification. We know through Hamlet that Gertrude mourned the loss of the King, but the audience doesn't learn this until later on in the play (1.2.149-151). The first time we see her, Gertrude tells Hamlet to stop mourning for his father because "all that lives must die,/Passing through nature to eternity" (1.2.72-3). Our first impression of Gertrude is as a woman largely unaffected by her husband's death, urging her son to be less affected. This leads audience members to understand that she isn't preserving her husband's ideal image, especially when she clearly highlights the ordinary nature of his death. Kusunoki suggests that not only does Gertrude fail to preserve King Hamlet's ideal image, but that

“this attitude implies that even Claudius...may be replaced by another, once he is dead” (174). In marrying Claudius at all, Gertrude challenges the patriarchal attitude towards widows in society.

Generally, women were thought of as placeholders for their sons within a family business, and Hamlet seems to imagine his mother in similar ways since he states that Claudius “popp’d in between the election and my hopes” (5.2.65). While it’s Claudius who takes the blame in Hamlet’s eyes, it’s possible that Gertrude’s decision to marry played a part in the electorate’s decision about who the new king should be. Margreta de Grazia explains that Hamlet’s birth coincides with King Hamlet’s overtaking of Fortinbras in a “coincidence [that] could not have been more auspicious. The annexing of land and the birth of a prince are a dynastic dream-come-true...the legal instruments drawn up at the time of the combat seem designed to assure that the territorial gain will be passed on to the victor’s descendants” (81-2). De Grazia cites Horatio’s speech, in which he explains that the forfeit of land is absolute, that “by a seal’d compact/well ratified by law and heraldy/did forfeit (with his life) all [those] his lands...to the conqueror;/Against which a moi’ty competent/Was gaged by our king, which had [returned]/To the inheritance of Forinbras” (1.1.86-92). De Grazia explains that “on the very day that Denmark won these inheritable lands, a prince to inherit them was born. Like a happy astrological convergence, the coincidence seems prophetic: Hamlet was born to rule” (82). But Hamlet does not rule. The land is not inherited by Hamlet, but by Claudius.

In remarrying at an older age, Gertrude breaks with patriarchal tradition. As Kusunoki explains, Gertrude “was an older widow, her marriage to King Hamlet having

lasted for almost thirty years, and, by her remarriage, she had robbed her son of the crown which, though Denmark is presented as an electoral state, he had expected to inherit from his father” (177). Furthermore, Kusunoki points out that Hamlet “has to face the fact that this admirable man [King Hamlet], too, had been guilty in his ‘days of nature’ (I.v.12) of acts for which he now has to go through purgatorial sufferings” (173). For a woman to hold up an ideal image of a man after his death, there has to be an ideal image to uphold. While Hamlet crafts this image of his father throughout the play, Shakespeare undermines this slightly by placing him in purgatory. While this doesn’t excuse Gertrude from her duties of idealizing her deceased husband, it does destabilize Hamlet’s memories of his parents’ perfect union, especially since Hamlet’s interpretation of their marriage casts King Hamlet as “So excellent a king; that was, to this,/Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother/That he might not beteem the winds of heaven/Visit her face too roughly,” which suggests the infallibility of the deceased King. Hamlet does not always refer to his father in this way, though. In the first act of the play, he tells Horatio that the old king was just “a man, take him for all and all” (1.2.187). When Hamlet first sees the Ghost, this is echoed. The Ghost explains that he is “doom’d for a certain term to walk the night,/And for the day confin’d to fast in fires,/Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature/Are burnt and purg’d away” (1.5.10-13). The focus soon shifts, however, from the old king’s sins to those of the New King. For the rest of the play, Hamlet maintains an ideal image of his father. The fact that Hamlet’s interpretation of the perfection of King Hamlet is undermined raises questions about the nature of Gertrude’s marriage to Claudius. Her marriage has not only scandalized Hamlet and the Ghost, but Kusunoki argues that it would likely have been viewed as scandalous in nature by the

audience. Kusunoki explains that society often viewed remarriage for younger women as acceptable, particularly since it was excused in the eyes of religion (174). In the Bible, Paul's first letter to Timothy "criticized the remarriage of widows, although he made an exception for young widows, who could marry lest they 'wax wanton' (1 Timothy 5.11, 12)...Thomas Becon...too made the familiar exception for young widows" (Kusunoki 174). Hamlet echoes this when he tells his mother that the reason for her marriage to Claudius cannot be love, because "at your age/The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,/And waits upon the judgment" (3.4.68-70). It seems that Hamlet might be able to forgive his mother if she married Claudius for the same reasons that excused young women for remarrying. He immediately refers to the impossibility of this, though, when he references her age. Remarriage for young widows, beyond solving the issue of wantonness, secured political and property interests as well through procreation (Kusunoki 175). This also assured the legitimization of offspring.

While the threat of a young woman's sexuality combined with her fertility made it acceptable for her to take on a new husband, other factors often intervened. Kusunoki elucidates: "in the case of widows of the upper class, the realities surrounding them – their relatives' political calculations and property interests – made it difficult for them to remain unmarried for long" (175). The same can be said of many working class women who lost husbands. McIntosh explains that "widowers – like widows – commonly remarried...by attending to the physical and emotional needs of their relatives, they [women] contributed to a positive social environment and enabled men to pursue work outside of the home" (3). For a widower with children or elderly relatives to care for, taking on a new wife would have been commonplace. Depending on the age of the

widower, chances are he would be looking for another widow to marry, particularly since she would have already proven herself capable of maintaining a household. Furthermore, McIntosh explains that “sermons, plays, and written texts taught that a woman should be part of a household unit supervised by a male head at every stage of her life” (4). This message to women would have encouraged them to “remain within the domestic context, busily employed in their household labors, supporting others, and responding with deference to the man who was responsible for ensuring their good behavior” (4). To fulfill this social ideal, though, women needed a head of the household, something remarriage offered to women who had lost a husband. For working widows, the domestic chores completed went beyond the cooking and cleaning, bleeding into necessary tasks for the running of the family business.

Widowed brewsters often found themselves in harsh circumstances. Bennett tells us that while a few of these women were able to eke out a living in the brewing industry, more found themselves unable to maintain the business. While married brewsters had the financial support of their husbands as well as the political advantages such a union offered, widows were often unable to afford servants to help run the business and they did not have a male figurehead to soften the blow of new regulations such as licensing requirements (Bennett 51-9). Often, the practical solution to the situation was to find meager work elsewhere or to remarry. Widows who chose to remarry often married senior apprentices within the business or formed a merger of sorts by marrying a fellow brewer, particularly since unmarried women, whether they were single or widowed, rarely remained part of the guild for a prolonged amount of time (65). The increase in

credit, income, and servants to help with the work made the option of remarriage appealing to brewsters (Bennett 41).

Similar circumstances led widowed printers' wives to remarry. Many women who had lost husbands found themselves unable to find a place within the guild (mostly due to financial or legal issues created from gender discrimination). These women had the option to sell their businesses to try to get enough money to live off of or pass the business on to an elder son, but H. Smith tells us that many widows married a senior apprentice or fellow printer (107). Such a union ensured a higher position for the senior apprentice while allowing the woman to preserve her business and her roles therein. While women in brewing did a large chunk of the actual production, women in printing occupied a more ambiguous position. Smith explains that there is little evidence for the details of women's work within the printing house, but that there is a suggested "pattern of women not as print-shop workers, but as overseers, who were deemed responsible for their products" (98). This suggests, then, that women in the printing industry may have been even more reliant upon a husband for not only the income and materials needed to run the business, but the workers as well.

While marrying a senior apprentice gave a widow the necessary household ingredients needed to continue working, it also provided a chance to marry someone with similar interests and beliefs. This was the case for Richard Field and Jacqueline Vautrollier. Smith explains that "Field displayed 'a fondness for printing and publishing religious material' ...thus his marriage to the Protestant Huguenot Jacqueline may suggest a shared commitment to religious practice, not simply a bid for Vautrollier's press and

equipment” (123). While marrying provided women with the kinds of material things they needed to run the business, it could also be the result of shared values.

It certainly seems possible that Gertrude’s marriage is one of shared values as well. While the queen has little need for a husband who could provide monetary or material support, Gertrude does demonstrate her appreciation of Claudius’s companionship and love. In many scenes, Gertrude appears onstage with Claudius. She even protects him from Laertes when he’s threatened. This care is reciprocated by Claudius, which is reminiscent of the kind of union shared by Field and Vautrollier. Not only does Claudius get to become King of Denmark and take on the powers of that role while Gertrude maintains her role as queen consort, but both parties are able to satisfy their inward desires for companionship. Claudius himself explains that Gertrude lives not only for Hamlet’s looks, but also “for myself” and that he cannot imagine living without her (4.7.12; 4.7.14-16). While this information comes from Claudius, Gertrude’s physical defense of Claudius from Laertes suggests her own loyalty and care for him. *Hamlet* emphasizes the emotional attachment between Gertrude and Claudius in multiple scenes. When Gertrude first begs Hamlet to remain in Denmark, Claudius immediately joins her, telling Hamlet “we beseech you, bend you to remain/Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye,/Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son” (1.2.115-117). Claudius first joins Gertrude in “beseeching,” then implies that he will continue watching over Hamlet as he remains the “comfort of *our* eye,” and finally accepts Hamlet as his own son (1.2.115; 1.2.117). While “our” could easily be a use of the royal we, Claudius’s discussion of familial issues in a conversation that has become limited to himself, Gertrude, and Hamlet suggests the possibility that it is not. Gertrude echoes this later on when she tells

Hamlet “thou hast thy father much offended” (3.4.10). While Gertrude clearly means that Hamlet has offended Claudius, Hamlet’s reply that “you have my father much offended” makes clear that he thinks of Old King Hamlet and not Claudius as his father (3.4.11). Despite Hamlet’s clear resistance to Claudius’s assumption of a fatherly role, Claudius does refer to Hamlet as his son and heir to the throne. After Hamlet kills Lord Polonius, the new king does not isolate Gertrude as the sole culprit for allowing Hamlet’s crime, but cries “Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answer’d?/It will be laid to us, whose providence/Should have kept short, restrain’d and out of haunt,/This mad young man: but so much was our love,/We would not understand what was most fit” (4.1.16-20). Claudius echoes his union with Gertrude by discussing Hamlet’s situation in both familial and political terms. While he uses the “royal we,” a rhetorically political tactic, it’s possible that he also refers to familial love.

Claudius’ interiority is reflected in moments when he refers to himself in the singular. In plotting to kill Hamlet, Claudius claims that “I like him not,” “I your commission will forthwith dispatch,” and “Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy viage” (3.3.1; 3.3.3; 3.3.24). Later on he again uses the singular in his prayer for help and repentance for his act of murder. Like Gertrude, Claudius articulates his guilty actions, though this stems more from his desire to be forgiven and saved from punishment (“what if this cursed hand/Were thicker than itself with brother’s blood,/Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens/To wash it white as snow?” (3.3.43-46)). Claudius seems to take part in the blame for not taking greater action against Hamlet when he was suspected of madness as well. He also seems to be telling the truth when he says “The queen his mother/Lives almost by his looks; and for myself—” (4.7.11-12). Gertrude’s love for

Claudius is suggested here to be equal to her love for Hamlet. Claudius reflects this when he states that Gertrude is “so conjunctive to my life and soul,/That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,/I could not but by her” (4.7.-14-16). Claudius abandons the royal we in favor of the singular while confessing his own love of Gertrude, seemingly reflecting his inner emotions apart from his role as king. The relationship between Claudius and Gertrude remains an intense and personal one.

This carries through in Gertrude’s support of Claudius as King of Denmark. Mary Hazard explains that a queen’s presence suggests her support of the events unfolding before her. Though Gertrude speaks less than 5% of the lines, she is notably present on stage for roughly 30% of the play. Gertrude accompanies Claudius in every scene unless she is directly asked to leave or Claudius is making plans that would be unacceptable to her. Just as Hazard has established a queen’s presence as a rhetorical device, Shakespeare writes in moments where Gertrude does the same. For example, when Gertrude and Claudius greet Guildenstern and Rozencrantz, Claudius ends by saying “Thanks, Rozencrantz and gentle Guildenstern,” which Gertrude follows with “Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rozencrantz” (2.2.33-4). While the delivery and staging of these lines can change their meaning within the play, the fact that Gertrude follows this up immediately by having her servants deliver Guildenstern and Rozencrantz to her son highlights her authority. It’s quite possible that Gertrude is correcting Claudius, which suggests that she has some latitude in pointing out minor errors. Regardless of whether she corrects Claudius or not, she does have a hand in delivering the pair to her son. Importantly, Gertrude’s power ends in defining the relationship Rozencrantz and Guildenstern have with her son. Claudius is the one who gives them agency, though

Gertrude does have a limited amount of power in the transaction. This same message is echoed when Claudius asks Gertrude to leave him, Polonius, and Ophelia alone and she responds, “I shall obey you” (3.1.37). This draws attention to the fact that Gertrude has the ability to refuse Claudius, as she does in the end of the play when she drinks from the poisoned cup. She does this seeking his pardon, but ultimately her actions demonstrate her independence from his will. In the closet scene, Hamlet also suggests Gertrude’s independence when he urges her not to “let the bloat king tempt you again to bed” (3.4.181). This suggests that Gertrude at least has the power to avoid Claudius if she so desires.

Gertrude’s reasons for choosing to obey Claudius appear closely linked to her love for him. As Kusunoki points out, even after the closet scene with Hamlet, it’s clear later on in the play that Gertrude still loves Claudius (180). Hamlet tells Gertrude not to “spread the compost on the weeds to make them ranker” by continuing on in her relationship with her new husband (3.4.151-2). Gertrude cries out that Hamlet “hast cleft my heart in twain,” though it’s unclear whether she is heartbroken because of guilt or because she has lost an ideal image of Claudius (3.4.156). Hamlet urges her not to return to Claudius’s bed and repents of killing Polonius. He then tells her he has “one word more,” to which Gertrude responds “What shall I do?” (3.4.179; 3.4.180). Gertrude asks what Hamlet wants her to do, but she doesn’t necessarily agree to do it. Hamlet again tells her not to go to bed with Claudius and most importantly not to tell the new king he’s only feigning madness. Gertrude assures Hamlet that “if words be made of breath,/And breath of life, I have no life to breathe/What thou hast said to me” (3.4.197-8). The only thing Gertrude agrees to do is keep Hamlet’s secret that he isn’t really insane. She never

tells Hamlet she will stay away from Claudius or change her countenance around him. Indeed, she seems to go on as usual in her interactions with Claudius on the stage. Kusunoki explains that when Gertrude hears about the revolt led by Laertes against Claudius, she turns on the mob and blames them for their ignorance about Polonius's death in "unusually violent terms: 'Oh this is counter, you false Danish dogs!' (IV.v.110)" (180). This is supported by Gertrude's physical restraining of Laertes; Claudius tells Gertrude twice to "Let him go" (4.5.123; 127). These lines are central to understanding Gertrude's relationship with Claudius. First, they write stage directions into the script. No matter how the play is performed, Gertrude simply has to be in physical contact with Laertes for these lines to make sense. This means that she is physically protecting Claudius, which demonstrates her deep concern for his safety. Furthermore, the fact that Claudius has to tell Gertrude twice to let go demonstrates Gertrude's agency in deciding to follow or dismiss her husband's instructions. Though Gertrude does eventually let Laertes go, she seems to do so only after Claudius says, "Tell me Laertes/Why thou art thus incensed" (4.5.126-7). These lines give Laertes reason to lessen his physical attack against Claudius, if only for long enough to explain to him the reason for his anger. This is shortly followed by Gertrude's insistence that her husband is innocent of the crime for which Laertes seeks revenge (4.5.129). Gertrude may have released Laertes, but she doesn't stop protecting Claudius. This scene, particularly the physicality of Gertrude in restraining Laertes, demonstrates the nature of her obedience to Claudius. She *chooses* to obey. Smith explains that marriages between an apprentice and widow could be extremely complex, even contestable since they often

challenged the common image of the man as the superior partner (107). This seems to be the dynamic Shakespeare draws attention to with these lines.

Kusunoki supports this in his article when he argues that “seen from the perspective of... dominant attitudes towards widows’ remarriage in early seventeenth-century England, which denied widows’ ability to make their own choice about whether or not to remarry, Gertrude’s remarriage to Claudius must have looked quite offensive” (177). While Gertrude may have appeared offensive to certain members of Shakespeare’s audience, the working classes and particularly the working women in the audience may have had a different reaction. While Shakespeare was writing, remarriage among older widows would have been more common than it became in later years. Kusunoki writes, “the rate of remarriage, especially among older widows, changed greatly in seventeenth-century England... the proportion of older widows who remarried decreased sharply as the seventeenth century went on” (176). Kusunoki explains that one explanation for this was the increasing longevity of men’s lives, which meant widows reached an older age before their husbands passed away (176). He goes on to acknowledge that “women’s increasing consciousness of their subjectivity was another factor which was responsible for... change; widows realized the importance of their freedom to shape their own lives and desired to keep their autonomy” (177). Widows began to assert their independence through the refusal to remarry. Shakespeare does something similar with Gertrude’s marriage to Claudius, though he does it in a different way. Though Gertrude does remarry, she does so as an older widow emerging from a marriage that, if we accept the information from “The Mousetrap” as correct, lasted thirty years. The Gravedigger also cites this figure when he says he’s been working at his job for thirty years, since the day

Hamlet was born (5.1.132-152). Kusunoki highlights the fact that “the motivation for her remarriage, which the play suggests is based on an assertion of autonomy, derives from the same emergent forces that can be observed in other widows’ decisions *not* to remarry; the free exercise of choice by an individual woman is the crucial factor in both cases” (177). The thing that bothers Hamlet so much about his mother’s remarriage is that it is a choice made by her that challenges his interpretation of his parents’ lives together. The fact that Gertrude *chooses* to remarry is what makes this particular union such a useful reflection of changing ideas surrounding remarriage. Shakespeare not only allows Gertrude the choice to remarry, but he endorses that choice to an extent as well, perhaps in an attempt to appeal to working class widows. Ultimately, though, Gertrude’s remarriage ends in disaster.

Widows of brewers often found themselves unable to maintain a position in the guild without a husband. Bennett explains that “not-married brewsters, whether widowed or never married or otherwise alone, remained in the guild for quite short periods of time, often only a year or two” (65). On an official level, women needed men to maintain a position in brewing. Bennett writes that “the office-holding capacities of men offered them (or their wives and other female kin) substantial advantages over other brewers” and explains that “in speaking before the court, an aletaster ... named husbands for the brewing done by their wives” (102; 103). In times where brewing done by women was mentioned or dealt with in an official capacity, the husbands of brewsters were credited. The husband’s role in an office provided increased benefits for the wife, not only allowing her to continue brewing, but offering her exemptions from brewing amercements or helping to drum up business (Bennett 102). In representing the business

to the larger public, then, men were not only helpful, but even necessary, especially as time went on and regulations increased. Bennett explains that by 1574, guild memberships contained only a few women or were all male (64). That's not to say that women weren't active in the business, but that their husbands rather than themselves were members of the guild. This provided women with good motivation to remarry to maintain their business. Even if these women weren't granted official recognition for their work, they were allowed to continue doing it through the official recognition of their husbands.

Many working widows struggled with issues of credit. McIntosh points out that "if a married woman wanted credit, the lender/seller would demand assurance that her husband supported her business transactions and would accept responsibility for whatever debts she incurred" (37-8). Women who had no husband suffered, because they had no husband to back their credit, which made it difficult to get. For married women, there were still challenges; McIntosh explains that "because of the common law's definition of married women as having no legal identity apart from their husbands, their ability to enter into contracts on their own or to pursue their interests in the courts was curtailed" (38). This had less impact on married women who retained their husbands' support. McIntosh goes on to clarify that "so long as production remained at an intermediate level and their husbands backed their activity, women's disabilities in the areas of obtaining credit and controlling labor were less pronounced" (39). For widows, the appeal of marrying a senior apprentice or fellow businessman not only ensured the necessary backing to get credit to run a business, but it also helped in keeping workers under control.

What's interesting about these marriages is that the power is more evenly split between the man and the woman than in other situations. Widows with printing and brewing businesses brought many assets to the marriage, including both knowledge of their trade and the materials needed to carry it on. In cases where widows who were left with their husbands' businesses remarried senior apprentices, it was the senior apprentice who benefitted from the match. Such a match was the melding of the two ingredients necessary for success: a man through which to be officially recognized and the materials needed for the actual running of the business. This inversion of power is where Gertrude fails to align with brewsters and printers.

Gertrude certainly receives personal benefits – companionship, security, protection – as well as the official recognition of her position as queen consort through her marriage to Claudius. What is less clear is what Claudius gains from the marriage. De Grazia explains that “in the constitutional form the play specifically assigns to Denmark, it is perfectly legal for the kingdom to pass to a collateral relation rather than the lineal...yet the overwhelming critical consensus still holds that Claudius has usurped the throne that should have passed to Hamlet” (87-8). While marrying a master printer or brewer's widow allowed a senior apprentice to move up the ranks and inherit that position, the play doesn't credit Claudius' rise to the throne as a direct result of his marriage to Gertrude. Nonetheless, marrying the queen couldn't hurt Claudius's odds of inheriting the throne (de Grazia 107). The power dynamics between Gertrude and Claudius seem to favor Claudius. In nearly every scene in which the pair appear together, Gertrude appears with Claudius onstage, speaks only a few lines if any, and leaves when asked. Then again, there are moments in the play where Gertrude asserts her will. This

posits the question of whether Gertrude is controlled by her husband or adheres to his desires because they align with her own. Gertrude's correction of Claudius's address of Guildenstern and Rozencrantz and her refusal to follow Claudius's instructions not to drink from the poisoned cup both underscore Gertrude's power within their marriage. Gertrude seems to have some latitude in obeying Claudius, but she is ultimately under his power and needs to maintain a union with him if she wants to continue to occupy the throne. Unlike working widows, Gertrude isn't identified as the main cause of Claudius' claim to power, but like working widows, she gains official recognition through their union.

Women involved in printing found it even more difficult than brewsters to receive guild membership without a husband. While H. Smith doesn't treat the exclusion of women from the printing guild as being purely based upon gender, the 1637 Star Chamber decree limiting the number of master printers in London to twenty ultimately pushed women printers out of the business. Though Smith points to multiple factors involved in the denial of women as master printers, she doesn't ignore the role of gender either. The simple fact is, married master printers would have received help from their wives with the running of the business, but these women were nowhere to be found in official documents (109). This, then, paints a picture similar to the one Bennett paints about brewsters. Women worked within the business, even ran the business, but were recognized officially under their husband's names. While Bennett provides more compelling evidence for unmarried or widowed brewsters being socially unaccepted, Smith also references ambiguous male attitudes toward the workings of women.

While working women often became one of the most clearly untrusted segments of society, anxieties surrounding women were common everywhere. Kusunoki's tracing of the change in attitude towards widows' remarriage shows an emerging acceptance of young widows taking new husbands, something accepted largely because it protected women and society from their own sexuality (174-5). With so much concern from Hamlet and the Ghost about Gertrude's sexual activities with Claudius, she is set up to suffer from the same fears of widows' uncontrollable sexuality that justified young widows' remarriage. While the play certainly sets this up as a negative character trait of Gertrude's, it also draws a connection between the justifications for younger widows' remarriages and Gertrude's as both parties are understood to have sexual desires. This extends the reasoning to Gertrude's own marriage.

In "Hamlet's Mother," Baldwin Maxwell examines Gertrude's resourcefulness. Maxwell observes that while Gertrude shares many of her husband's interests, she is also clearly able to see what bothers Hamlet about her union. This awareness and empathy reflects the brewers' and printers' wives' experiences and their ability to navigate the loss of a husband and business partner by remarrying to maintain their businesses. It also suggests that Gertrude understands the political climate in which she lives. Gertrude simply cannot be queen consort on her own. She has to take on a partner in order to maintain her political role and title. In marrying Claudius, she accomplishes this. Furthermore, Gertrude's marriage to Claudius itself suggests her power to change her own circumstances, also highlighting her influence over her son and prior husband. Her marriage spurs the ghost to appear and charge Hamlet with the task of avenging his death. Gertrude sets the action of the play in motion with her choice to marry Claudius. She

continues to keep the action moving as she chooses to defend or defy Claudius at key moments in the play.

When Gertrude drinks the poisoned drink at the end of *Hamlet*, she captures the crowd's recognition of her influence and independence. It is important that Gertrude's death does not happen in an isolated recess of the castle but is placed in the eye of the community. Kusunoki writes that Gertrude "claims her own authority, though in a limited sense, by drinking the wine in defiance of Claudius's order not to drink it and revealing the truth that it was poisoned" (180). If Gertrude is acting in defiance of Claudius's orders in an attempt to claim authority, it makes sense that this would take place in a space occupied by multiple members of society. Her dismissal of Claudius's order also reveals his own corruption within the play. This, too, needs to happen in the presence of an audience. While we see relatively little of Gertrude's political power within the play, she enters the stage with booming authority when she marries Claudius and again when she exits the stage, displaying his true nature to the community. Though Gertrude had no idea the cup was poisoned, she uses her dying breath to tell Hamlet about her husband's deceitful actions, crying "the drink, the drink,--O my dear Hamlet,--/The drink, the drink! I am poison'd" (5.2.309-10). In doing this, Gertrude uses the power she gained through her marriage to Claudius to ruin his plans and reputation with the community. While it's questionable that Gertrude has the power to make Claudius, by revealing his criminal actions she does have the power to break him.

When Gertrude begins to drink from the cup, Claudius says, "It is the poison'd cup: it is too late" (5.2.292). This line suggests that Claudius's order to Gertrude not to drink the wine is not so much to preserve his original intent of harming Hamlet (as he

still has the poisoned sword to finish the job with), but rather an effort to protect Gertrude. When she doesn't listen, he realizes that it is too late to prevent her death. Upon this realization, however, Claudius doesn't make a display of himself, but tries to hide from the crowd what is actually happening to the queen, saying "She swoonds to see them bleed" (5.2.308). Claudius attempts to maintain the image he has constructed of himself for the community despite the loss of his personal relationship with Gertrude. Claudius's trustworthiness is called into question by Gertrude when she negates his comment. Though the correctness of Gertrude's assertion that the drink is poisoned is largely to credit for the shift in Claudius's reception among the crowd, it's important that Hamlet listens to his mother over Claudius, demanding that the treachery be sought out, drawing a confession from Laertes. Gertrude's power as queen, once she casts lots against Claudius, is reinstated through Hamlet's conviction that she tells the truth. Again, her power is mediated by the men around her.

This same circumstance was also faced by the widows of brewers and printers. Bennett explains that "in late sixteenth-century London, brewing was a man's trade that widows were expected to maintain for both their own support and the eventual inheritance of their children" (57). Working widows were meant to maintain the family business for their sons. The widows who had children nearly old enough to inherit the business were therefore largely accepted as brewers because of the temporary nature of their presence in the industry. The fact that Gertrude's accusations against Claudius have to be endorsed by Hamlet to be fully accepted echoes the importance of having an older son for working women who wanted their business to be officially sanctioned.

Smith explains that a widow's printing house, were she to remarry another outside of the industry after her husband's death, was passed down to the eldest son (117). This suggests a similar standing in the guild in which a widow's business is acceptable if there was a male child who would later on inherit the business. While this didn't provide women with the kind of material resources required to run a business (such as money, employees, machinery), it did provide her with the standing she needed on an official level to continue in her former role prior to the death of her husband.

Prior to her death, however, Gertrude embraces the necessity of marriage to remain queen consort rather than queen mother. To keep this political position, she needed to have a king. While Gertrude isn't solely responsible for Claudius's election to the throne, de Grazia writes that their marriage at the beginning of the play

consolidates Claudius' position. In an elective monarchy, both the brother and the son of the deceased king would have consanguineous claims to the throne. What decides the contest in the brother's favor is his conjugal (and coital) union with the 'imperial jointress' (1.2.9). 'Man and wife,' as Hamlet points out, 'is one flesh' (4.3.55), and their union is both sacramental and legal. The prior tie between 'man and mother,' however, proves less binding. By becoming her 'husband's brother's wife' (3.4.14), she obliterates the claim of her first husband's son, and the electorate legitimizes the result. In the absence of any directive from the will of the deceased father, succession is guided by the will of the mother. (107)

While Gertrude doesn't take full credit for Claudius's election, their marriage does strengthen his position. De Grazia suggests that while both Claudius and Hamlet have bloodlines linking them to the throne, it is Claudius's union with Gertrude that "decides the contest in [Claudius's] favor" (107). De Grazia goes so far as to argue that by marrying Claudius, Gertrude "obliterates the claim of her first husband's son" and acts on the fact that "succession is guided by the will of the mother" (de Grazia 107). Though I have reservations about just how much the text of *Hamlet* supports this argument (the

council never states their reasons for electing Claudius king rather than Hamlet, which neither affirms nor negates the possibility that it the marriage between Claudius and Gertrude helped to determine the final outcome), it does present intriguing possibilities. If it is Claudius' marriage to Gertrude that tips the political scales in his favor, the possibility arises that Gertrude's remarriage is reflective of her indirect influence over the election of the new king. While this wouldn't place Claudius under Gertrude's control, it would be a much more impactful example of Gertrude's potential for influencing the political sphere indirectly through her personal relationships with those around her.

Within her personal relationships, Gertrude demonstrates her power a bit more clearly, particularly in her dismissal of Claudius's order not to drink from the poisoned cup. Kusunoki suggests that Gertrude's "integrity is shown in her demonstration that she is a good mother when she protects her son from her husband" (180). When Kusunoki refers to Gertrude's "integrity," he seems to be referring not only to her personal integrity, but to her standing within the larger community. Gertrude demonstrates a personal kind of integrity again and again, both in defending Hamlet from Claudius by upholding Hamlet's madness as real, as well as in defending Claudius from Hamlet's actions. Gertrude's standing with the community is a different matter altogether. All of Gertrude's power within the community comes in the form of a man; her marriage to Claudius maintains her status as queen and Hamlet's validation of her rebellion against Claudius maintains her image of integrity.

Gertrude's marriage to Claudius reflects the power dynamics at play for Gertrude in *Hamlet*. In marrying Claudius, Gertrude demonstrates her susceptibility to the same material needs working women required for running a successful business: her marriage

reflects the need for a woman to be endorsed by a man in order to maintain her role in an officially regulated space. Finally, Gertrude's character manipulates these powers repeatedly to propel the play's action forward. Though the power dynamics within remarriage differ vastly between Gertrude and working widows, there are small connections to be made between Gertrude and the kinds of triumphs and pitfalls working women faced in early modern England.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This thesis is far from a comprehensive view of the character, Gertrude, and larger themes of private and public, interiority and exteriority. Rather, it offers a glimpse at these larger themes in relation to working class widows and Shakespeare's Gertrude to suggest the ways in which working women and widows in early modern England offer fascinating analogues to Gertrude's character. Scholarship on Gertrude has been largely concerned with her sexuality and her motives for marriage. Early modern brewsters and women printers were subject to similar forms of speculation. Thus, while Shakespeare may not have deliberately or consciously sought to pattern Gertrude after the lived experiences and complexities of the lives of working class women and widows, such a pattern, precedent, and lively warrant emerges when we closely examine Shakespeare's Gertrude alongside the scholarly conversation about her and what has recently been recovered about the lives of working class women in early modern England.

The physical space Gertrude occupies in the play becomes far more complex when examined in terms of the vexed and overlapping binary of private and public spheres. In passing through the boundaries of the household and the business of being queen, Gertrude demonstrates the circumstances many working women faced. Having a space in the household and the business allowed women the freedom to cross the public/private boundaries and simultaneously created more responsibilities for women to fulfill. It also meant that their contributions in the business, while obvious to the community at large, were largely overlooked in an official capacity. Despite this fact,

women literally occupied both the space of the household and that of the business in a way similar to Gertrude's occupation of sequestered spaces of the castle and those more open to the community.

A similar phenomenon occurs in Gertrude's relationships with other characters in the play. Though she appears to partly share rule in Denmark, she is also a mother, wife, and widow. As a queen, these relationships become as politically charged as they are personal to her own family. Similarly, her role as a queen is influenced by her personal bonds with the men who surround her. The complexity of both Gertrude's relationships and her official role as queen suggest a character that resists demonization and idolization. She comes instead to represent larger tensions faced by women, and particularly working women, in early modern England. While brewsters and printers' wives occupied highly domestic roles in the household as mothers and wives, they also functioned in the more public realm of the business world. Factors from the household (including but not limited to issues like credit, financial support, and servants) influenced a woman's success in the business world just as factors from the business world (income) impacted the kind of home life a woman and her family might lead. Similarly, Gertrude's decisions based upon political success influence her relationships with her family.

The reputation of a woman's interior nature and exterior business practices highly influenced her success in the business world. This reputation, though often linked with a woman's status as a working widow, might also be impacted by the more personal issue of her gender. Gertrude's character reflects a similar battle, as she both reflects and deflects stereotypes about working women. The charges Hamlet levels against Gertrude for marrying Claudius bring out moments of interiority, particularly in the closet scene

when Gertrude looks upon her soul. Gertrude's love for her son and Claudius also demonstrate her interiority, along with the idea that she is a good mother and a good wife, though she is far from perfect. Her hasty and incestuous marriage undermines the innocent nature of her affections. Printers' and brewers' wives faced similar circumstances; despite the fact that their roles in business matters were often necessary to success, they were often deemed less trustworthy than men. These stereotypes reflected anxiety about both the interior nature of a woman and the exterior impact this might have on their customers. A woman on her own without a man to intervene between a woman's inward waywardness and her actions against clients found it difficult to accrue credit and respect within their businesses, often resulting in remarriage.

Gertrude's marriage to Claudius seems to nod to this circumstance. Few women were able to maintain their role in a business without a husband to back them in matters of accruing credit, workers, and the official backing of the guilds. Marrying Claudius offers Gertrude similar benefits and ultimately allows her to maintain her position as Queen of Denmark. What's more, Gertrude's remarriage is an example of her own agency in the play, something supported by her decision to listen to Claudius at certain moments and disobey him at others. These moments point to the unsteady classification of Gertrude's marriage as purely for public or private reasons. While Gertrude gains the political benefit of maintaining her throne through her marriage, she also demonstrates her concern for Claudius' safety when Laertes tries to hurt him. Her reasons for marrying Claudius, then, seem to rest somewhere closer to the middle of the scale between private and public. Her relationship with Claudius also demonstrates her interiority, particularly in demonstrating her concern for his safety. Simultaneously, though, her marriage is an

incredibly exterior act, something often displayed to the public for political benefits and social status.

In nearly all aspects of the play, Gertrude's character resists a clear classification. Because we see only glimpses into Gertrude's interiority and because she doesn't operate wholly in the private or public realm, the analogue of the working widow has been particularly inviting. Still, working widows are not the only group of women that might provide important insight to Gertrude's character. In adopting Greenblatt's theory of the circulation of social energy, this thesis must also be taken as simply a piece of the puzzle. The impact working widows had on society is clearly present in ballads, court cases, and the general ambiguity about women and power. Working class women, however, make up only one group out of many to contribute to cultural ideas surrounding widows and power. For the purposes of this thesis, limiting my examination to working widows made sense. For the purposes of understanding Gertrude's character, however, it does not. There's still much more work to be done.

An examination of royal widows would provide another layer of critical analysis about the tensions between public and private, interiority and exteriority. While this examination of working class widows has, I hope, shed light on the complexity of Gertrude's character, it also suggests a need for further exploration into various classes of society and widows to further understand the factors that may have influenced Shakespeare's formation of Gertrude. Though Shakespeare may have been more familiar with working class widows and the challenges they faced, Gertrude is nevertheless written as a queen. Shakespeare certainly had some interaction with royal women both in limited personal interactions and, perhaps more significantly, in print, and it's quite

possible that these women contributed a great deal to Gertrude's character. Better understanding the situations royal widows may have dealt with might shed further light on the formation of Gertrude as a character. While working widows certainly enjoyed certain power and freedom in burgeoning businesses, their power is different from the kind of political power a royal woman would have had. Examining the implications of that power and the cultural response to it would provide more knowledge about the kind of cultural trends Shakespeare may have channeled into *Hamlet*. An examination of documents written for or about these women might also hint at the kind of cultural reception these women received, what stereotypes surrounded them, and how the issue of remarriage was thought of among the upper classes.

Similarly, an exploration into the lives of Queen Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots might provide an opportunity for further analysis. Because Gertrude is the Queen of Denmark, it would be useful to examine real-life queens and contemporary royal widows such as Catherine de Medici and Marie de Medici in an effort to delve further into the political rhetoric employed with Gertrude's character. Further exploration into the power of a queen's presence or absence as well as other modes of silent language discussed by Mary Hazard would couple well with this. What's more, examining what exactly these queens did in their time as rulers might provide insight into the kind of power the audience would understand Gertrude to have. While Gertrude is not a queen regnant, certain factors may have carried over from Queen Elizabeth's rule. Furthermore, Mary Queen of Scots might bring more information forward about the role of marriage between a king and queen. In exploring the lives of queens and the reputations they had in early modern England, patterns may emerge in the play that hint at not only personal

implications of widowhood, but also at what it means to be a woman with political power in a culture that demonstrates such ambivalence about women in general.

Gertrude seems to demonstrate the uneasy position of women, and particularly working women, in early modern England fairly well. By utilizing research about working women and their lives alongside primary works like ballads and court cases as a lens through which to view Gertrude's role in the play, a new interpretation of this character as an analogue to working widows and the situations they faced emerges. As a character, Gertrude indicates the need for a re-examination of women, and especially working women and the power they held in society. My aim in this thesis has been to treat Gertrude as a complex female character who is representative of more than just a woman who silently obeys her husband's commands, but rather demonstrates her own individuality and agency as analogous to women who lived and worked in early modern England. By examining Gertrude's character in light of these complexities, I hope to have contributed in some small way to the conversation about her. I look forward to seeing further research into the intricate nature of Gertrude's interiority/exteriority and private/public actions and relationships.

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