Shakespeare and Domestic Economy

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This paper (which originated as a lecture given at Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo and Hiroshima University, Hiroshima in November 2019, and has been minimally modified) discusses Shakespeare's handling of domestic economy in four plays, three comedies and a tragedy. I am using economics to mean the management of resources within the household; usually this refers to material resources such as property, but it may also signify other kinds of resources such as emotional capital or even the members of a family, who may function as economic assets. I am thus drawing on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, symbolic elements comprising social assets, which controls one's position within the social order.

Shakespeare came from a background which was likely to have provided him with a good understanding of the economic basis of social dealings and of the significance of money and property in the life of the family. His father, John Shakespeare, came of farming stock but was himself a tradesman, trained in the skilled work of leathercraft; he became a small businessman, buying and reselling goods for a profit, lending money for interest, not always working inside the law. For a time, when Shakespeare was a boy, his father was financially successful, and owned three houses in Stratford upon Avon; he was a man of substance in the town and held several municipal offices; but as Shakespeare entered his teenage years, his father became significantly poorer and withdrew from civic life. His illegal money-lending and other business activities came to light and he found himself in debt. He was obliged to sell two of his houses, and at one time he owed £132 (about £20,000 in today's money) to the Crown, which was pursuing him for payment. His credit as an entrepreneur suffered, and his reputation only began to recover just before he died.

William Shakespeare, on the other hand, became rich and successful, but not through writing plays. The money he made through the theatrical profession came from investments – he became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594, and in 1599 a part-owner of the new Globe

playhouse, thus receiving a share of all the company's profits and also a portion of the rent that the sharers paid. In 1597, aged 35, he was rich enough to buy New Place, one of the best houses in Stratford upon Avon. Over the coming years he accumulated more property and land, in and around Stratford; he became a land speculator, and guarded his money carefully, pursuing his debtors in court actions, and not always paying his own taxes where he could avoid it. Stephen Greenblatt refers to the 'exceptionally large income' he was enjoying in the early years of the 17th century, and the considerable investments in land that he was then making; Greenblatt considers that Shakespeare was planning carefully for his retirement.[1] He would not be like King Lear, dependent in old age on his daughters. As late as 1613, three years before his death, he bought his only property in London, a gatehouse at the Blackfriars priory, near the theatre, but it seems he never lived there. At his death he left to his elder daughter, Susanna, his chief beneficiary, in his will 'all my barnes stables Orchardes gardens landes tenementes & hereditamentes Whatsoever. . . within the townes Hamlettes villages ffieldes & groundes of Stratford upon Avon Oldstratford Bushopton & Welcombe',[2] as well as New Place and the Blackfriars gatehouse. She was a lucky woman.

Another factor to consider is that Shakespeare, who was intensely sensitive to social and cultural change, was writing during a period of economic transformation. One particular manifestation of that with relevance to his plays was the proliferation of newly available consumer goods, many of them imported, and in the reclassification of such items, changing cultural status from rare and costly to everyday. The social depth of ownership was a matter for remark. William Harrison, a cleric and historian, writing during the later sixteenth century, noted that while 'in noblemen's houses it is not rare to see abundance of arras, rich hangings of tapestry, silver vessel, and so much other plate as may furnish sundry cupboards, to the sum oftentimes of £1,000 or £2,000 at the least', you could also find in the houses of wealthy citizens 'great provision of tapestry, Turkey work, pewter, brass, fine linen'. More surprisingly, even 'inferior artificers and many farmers' had the means to

[1] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (2004), pp. 364, 361. See also Lois Potter, *The Life of William Shakespeare* (2012), pp. 41–8, on the financial fortunes of John Shakespeare.
[2] E.J.A. Honigmann and Susan Brock, eds, *Playhouse Wills 1558–1642* (1993), p. 107.

'garnish their cupboards with plate, their joint beds with tapestry and silk hangings, their tables with carpets and fine napery'.[3] Historians are suspicious of the accuracy of this account, but Harrison's views have sociological significance. And analyses of wills and probate inventories provide evidence of the increasing number of household goods at all except the lowest levels. Distinctions in the quantity and quality of domestic goods, 'household stuff', as it was known, were important in demarcating the gradations of social status.[4]

The expansion of London as a trading city, the greatest in Europe, accompanied the birth of capitalism in England; the market and its processes infiltrated all aspects of social interaction. As Vivian Thomas puts it in his study of Shakespeare's economic and political language, 'The essence of the market is connectedness: innumerable transactions are linked in a complex network, too labyrinthine to be easily comprehended. Agents, factors, go-betweens inhabit a world awash with goods, services, cash and credit. They penetrate every fissure and interstice, filling those spaces with their activity.'[5] This was of course the time when commercial theatre came into existence in England, and the social and economic conditions were in place for it to flourish. Thomas continues, 'Theatre owed its very existence to the market; its elaborated, mind-enhancing commodity dramatized the genius of the market, its transmutative character, exchange displaying a generative capacity in which everything and everybody changed. At the same time it exposed the inordinate appetite and greed which the market both stimulated and celebrated. The economics of everyday life was shifting from survival and sufficiency to acquisition and accumulation'.[6]

The early modern household was in itself an economic unit. In a contemporary text which was highly influential on the many manuals about domestic life produced in this period, *Xenophons treatise of housholde* (1532), a dialogue in Platonic style, one of the speakers describes as complementary the roles of husband and wife: 'A wyfe, beinge a good companion and a good felowe to her husbande in a house, is very necessary, and within a littel as

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[3] William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen (1968, 1994), p. 200.
[4] Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* (2002), ch. 1, discusses the 'status-function' of household stuff.
[5] Vivian Thomas, *Shakespeare's Political and Economic Language: A Dictionary* (2008), p. xxi.
[6] Thomas, p. xxi.

moche worthe as the husband. For commonlye goodes and substance do come in to the house by the labour and payne of the man, but the woman is she for the moste parte, that kepeth and bestoweth it, where nede is' (p. 11). Xenophon distinguishes between those activities which must be carried out inside the house, such as child care, cooking, spinning, and weaving, and those which take place outside it. Inside and outside are separate, gendered, spheres: 'It is more honestie for a woman to kepe her house, than to walke aboute. And it is more shame for a man to byde slouggynge at home than to applie his mynde to suche thynges as must be done abrode' (p. 25). Hence the economic success of the household depends on the contribution of both parties, but in this patriarchal model the man's ability to go out into the world and provide is key. A man's worth and status, his credit, to use a term from economics, depended on his economic standing; if he could not demonstrate financial security he would find himself socially downgraded and excluded from bonds of trust based upon such security. The term husband originally referred to the master of a house, and the verb, to husband, meant to manage or cultivate, or to be thrifty and economical with material resources. The term husbandry in Shakespeare is commonly connected to the management of resources, which is the primary job of the man in the household. A man's social identity is in large part determined by his economic status. The expression 'a man of no worth' meant a poor man. Many of the key terms in early modern economics have also an ethical dimension: trust, credit, bonds, value.

We can see many of these concepts at work in the first play I shall discuss, Shakespeare's early comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew*. This action of this play takes place in three households, differentiated in their attitudes towards social display and material wealth: that of the unnamed Lord, in the early scenes, who entertains his social opposite, the tinker Christopher Sly, with lavish hospitality, not out of generosity but in order to play a trick on him; that of Baptista, a well-to- do citizen of Padua, who has two daughters to marry off; and in the fourth act the household of Petruccio, a gentleman of Verona, who has married one of Baptista's daughters. The Lord is evidently extremely wealthy and owns a country house large enough to take in 'some noble gentleman that means, / Travelling some journey, to repose him here' (Ind. 1. 74–5) or to accommodate overnight the troupe of travelling players who arrive, apparently unexpectedly (and will in due course present *The Taming*

of the Shrew). He tells a servant munificently, 'take them to the buttery / And give them friendly welcome every one; / Let them want nothing that my house affords' (Ind. 1. 101–3). His intention is to carry out a kind of social experiment on Sly, to discover whether, by immersing a penniless drunk in wealth and luxury, he can make the man forget his own identity and social standing, and believe himself to be what the servants call him, a 'thrice-noble lord'. How far is identity shaped by material conditions, Shakespeare appears to be asking at this point? Though he takes the question no further in this play, he returns to it later, especially in *King Lear*.

So the Lord has Sly taken to his best bedchamber, richly appointed, attended by a bevy of obsequious servants, and entertained in the height of luxury. What he offers is a fantasy of hospitality, such that almost none of Shakespeare's audience would have come near experiencing, available only to those at the very top of the social scale, people who owned the kind of house in which Queen Elizabeth might have been entertained. Next on the scale comes Baptista, who also enjoys material wealth, but of the kind associated with a rich citizen rather than an aristocrat. He is a beneficent patriarch, 'kind and liberal' in providing for his daughters' education with private tutors, and widely known to be 'very rich'. His main problem is disposing of his daughters. In this highly stratified and patriarchal society, daughters are not directly an economic asset, since they must be provided with attractive dowries to lure the right sort of suitor. Their value lies in their ability to create, through marriage, symbolic capital in the form of family alliances. As Stephanie Chamberlain observes, 'Dowry, at once the mechanism through which marriages are contracted to protect social hierarchies as well as to secure marital and political alliances, also become the means by which to endow daughters with lands, property and cash within a social system favouring primogeniture'.[7] Her point here relates to *King Lear*, which I will discuss later, but it shows why Baptista is interested in the families of his daughters' suitors. Lucentio, who will marry Bianca, tells us in his first speech that his father is Vincentio, of the famous Bentivogli family, and 'a merchant of great traffic through the world' (1.1.12). When Petruccio, a landed gentleman 'born

[7] Stephanie Chamberlain, '"She is herself a dowry": *King Lear* and the Problem of Female Entitlement in Early Modern England', p. 171.

in Verona, old Antonio's son', who has come to Padua, like Lucentio, to better his economic prospects and to secure a wife, presents himself to Baptista as a suitor to Katharina, whom he has never met, it is his family and economic standing that guarantee his suitability. His address to his future father-in-law makes clear that their relationship is to be negotiated in economic terms:

> Signor Baptista, my business asketh haste,
> And every day I cannot come to woo.
> You knew my father well, and in him me,
> Left solely heir to all his lands and goods,
> Which I have bettered rather than decreased.
> Then tell me, if I get your daughter's love,
> What dowry shall I have with her to wife? (2.1.113–19)

The two men quickly agree terms, which are hugely, perhaps laughably, generous on both sides. Baptista will offer 'after my death, the one half of my lands, / And in possession twenty thousand crowns' (2.1.120–1). (This would equal £5000, at a time when London tradesmen might earn £5 or £6 a year.) Petruccio offers Katherina, should he die before her, 'all my lands and leases whatsoever' (2.1.124); this would also have been understood by a contemporary audience as extremely generous, since a widow would normally have had only a partial claim on her husband's estate.[8] Baptista adds that Petruccio must first obtain 'that special thing. . . her love' (2.1.127–8), but this seems like a secondary consideration. When he has witnessed the couple's first meeting he is despondent about the chances of the marriage being a success; Katherina is a liability as a daughter because of her unwomanly temper, and her father knows he is taking a risk. 'Faith, gentlemen', he says, 'now I play a merchant's part / And venture madly on a desperate mart' (2.1. 330–1). His mercantile idiom is developed by Tranio, who comments cynically, 'Twas a commodity lay fretting by you; / 'Twill bring you gain, or perish on the sea' (2.1.332–3). Thus he identifies Katherina as a tradable article of diminishing value; by implication Baptista is her seller, who has some chance of gain from her though

[8] See under Dowager/Widow, in B.J.Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare's Legal Language: A Dictionary* (2000), where the complexities of the widow's position are examined. See also B.J. and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law and Marriage* (2003), pp. 181–3 on Petruccio's offer.

equally his goods may 'perish on the sea'.

For the second daughter, Bianca, a much more desirable commodity, Baptista needs to offer no dowry, but has only to stand back and watch while two suitors competitively bid for her. Once again, the woman herself is not present; the bargaining is done entirely by the men. The terms are farcical but the social practice a real one. Old Gremio begins, with a boastful display of material wealth:

> First, as you know, my house within the city
> Is richly furnished with plate and gold,
> Basins and ewers to lave her dainty hands:
> My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry;
> In ivory coffers I have stuffed my crowns,
> In cypress chests my arras counterpoints,
> Costly apparel, tents and canopies,
> Fine linen, Turkey cushions bossed with pearl,
> Valance of Venice gold in needlework,
> Pewter and brass, and all things that belongs
> To house or housekeeping; then at my farm
> I have a hundred milch-kine to the pail,
> Six score fat oxen standing in my stalls,
> And all things answerable to this portion. (2.1.350–66)

It is a mouth-watering catalogue of luxury household status objects, many of them imported (Tyrian tapestry, Turkey cushions, valance of Venice), testament to the abundance of expensive domestic goods currently flooding the markets of early modern London. Tranio won't compete on Gremio's terms: his offer is shorter but more incisive – he has 'houses three or four as good . . . as any one / Old Signior Gremio has in Padua', and in addition he will give Bianca a jointure of 'two thousand ducats by the year / Of fruitful land' (2.1.370–4), a jointure being a settlement made on a woman at marriage in provision for her widowhood.[9] Gremio ups his offer to include an argosy (large merchant vessel), but Tranio claims to have three of these plus many other

[9] For an explanation of Shakespeare's use of this term, see 'Jointure' in Sokol and Sokol (2000).

ships. Since all of his offers are entirely fictional he will always win the bidding war. Baptista gives in: 'I must confess your offer is the best' (2.1.390). But, businessman to the last, he has one more thing to settle: the dower, a payment made by the husband to the bride's relatives, in case of his early death. This agreed, Bianca's future is arranged.

Katherina is the first to be married, and hurried away precipitately from her wedding reception to her husband's country house, claimed as the first item in his 'catalogue of domestic objects':[10] 'She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house, / My household- stuff, my field, my barn, / My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything' (3.2.231–3). This establishment offers a total contrast to the Lord's. In the former, domestic routines ran so smoothly as to be invisible, servants were obedient, everything was to hand, but in Petruccio's house the servants scramble to get ready for the arrival of their master and his new bride, and the domestic labour that goes to the running of a large house is exposed in mundane detail. Fires must be lit, floors strewn with rushes, cobwebs swept, carpets laid, and all the servants dressed in their liveries. But Petruccio is not impressed: 'Where be these knaves? What, no man at the door / To hold my stirrup nor to take my horse?' (4.1.106–7) Grumio, Petruccio's groom, excuses their unreadiness: 'Nathaniel's coat, sir, was not fully made, / And Gabriel's pumps were all unpink'd i'th' heel . . There were none fine but Adam, Rafe and Gregory, / The rest were ragged, old and beggarly' (4.1.118–23). This shambolic atmosphere, along with Petruccio's abuse of his servants accompanied by a constant stream of demands, are of course part of his plan to tame his shrewish wife, which is rendered in the material terms of domestic housekeeping – what he denies her are food, clothes, and household comfort. Petruccio is not a poor man, but a country gentleman, who will bring into Baptista's family the lands and property that the cash-rich citizen lacks. His attitude towards his household stuff is designed to make a point. Unlike the suitors for Bianca, who is surrounded by conspicuous consumption, he makes no display of material wealth, but rather of parsimony; and when he sets off with Katherina to share a communal meal at Baptista's house, it is stressed that the couple are dressed in 'honest mean habiliments', the embodiment of

[10] Lena Cowen Orlin, 'The Performance of Things in *The Taming of the Shrew*', *Yearbook of English Studies* 32 (1993), p. 180.

thrift.

The last act demonstrates that it is Katherina, at one stage a risky commodity in the marriage market, who brings wealth to her marriage and assured profit to Petruccio's venture. Taking their ease in Baptista's house after supper, the three newly married men, Petruccio, Lucentio (now Bianca's husband) and a third, Hortensio, who has married a widow, make a bet on the obedience of their wives, as to which will answer her husband's summons first. Wifeliness is worth money, and it is Katherina who wins for Petruccio, bringing in not only the other men's wagers, but also a bonus payment from her father, who is so amazed by her transformation into the perfect wife that he gives her another 20 thousand crowns, 'another dowry for another daughter / For she is changed as she had never been'. She crowns her display of wifely obedience by delivering a sermon to the other wives on the ideal patriarchal marriage and the wife's role within the household. Xenophon emphasised the gendered division of labour in a household as divinely decreed: 'For [God] hath ordained, that he woman shulde kepe those thynges, that the man getteth and bryngeth home to her' (p. 24). Katherina's speech confirms this; as she tells the other wives:

> Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
> Thy head, thy sovereign: one that cares for thee
> And for thy maintenance; commits his body
> To painful labour both by sea and land,
> . . .
> While thou liest warm at home, secure and safe. (5.2.152–7)

Wives must not expect to take control within the household, or 'seek for rule, supremacy and sway'. Their job is to extend gratitude towards their husbands, and reward their provision of goods with 'love, fair looks and true obedience - / Too little payment for so great a debt'. The household created by marriage is in the well-known words of Dod and Cleaver a 'little commonwealth' (*A Godly Form of Household Government*, 1598), and must be run on the basis of fair exchange for goods and services provided.

The role of the wife in the household, and the importance of financial solvency to male status are also important in my next play, another early

comedy, *The Comedy of Errors*, but this time my focus shifts to the relationship between the household and the marketplace, the two spaces where the play's action is located. They are linked by the theme of money's role in negotiating relationships, and the concept of trust in business transactions and in marriage. A family, husband and wife, plus two identical twin sons and their identical twin servants, have been separated in a storm at sea, and the sons and servants have grown up apart in different cities, Syracuse and Ephesus, both centres of Mediterranean trading. Now circumstances bring them, unknown to one another, together in Ephesus, where the father of the family, a rich merchant Egeon, newly arrived in Ephesus, finds himself sentenced to death, on account of a trade war between Ephesus and Syracuse, unless a large fine (1000 marks, about £750) can be paid for him before sunset. One of his twin sons, Antipholus of Syracuse, along with his servant, Dromio of Syracuse, has also just arrived in the marketplace of Ephesus; these two know nothing of Egeon, nor of the fact that their identical (and identically named) twins, Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus, are near at hand. The two Antipholuses are different in character and situation: Antipholus of Ephesus is, like his father, a rich merchant, married, and master of a large and prosperous household, presided over by his wife Adriana and his servant Dromio of Ephesus. Antipholus of Syracuse, also a businessman, is a bachelor, lonely and melancholy, come to Ephesus in search of his family. But of course they are identical in appearance, and the device of two sets of identical twins in the same location gives rise to a complex network of farcical misunderstandings mostly around marriage and money.

The economies of the marketplace are offset against those of the household from the start, when the servant Dromio of Ephesus appears and urges the man he takes to be his master, actually Antipholus of Syracuse, to hurry home to dinner; it is two o'clock, well past the usual time for the midday meal, the main one of the day in early modern England. The constraints of time-keeping that structure domestic routine and the production of meals at fixed times are juxtaposed against the more leisurely life of the marketplace, and of the male-dominated space outside the house. Adriana wife of Antipholus of Ephesus fumes angrily inside her home because her husband is late; her sister Luciana tries to placate her:

Perhaps some merchant hath invited him,
And from the mart he's somewhere gone to dinner.
Good sister, let us dine and never fret.
A man is master of his liberty;
Time is their master, and when they see time
They'll go or come: if so, be patient, sister. (2.1.4–9)

But Adriana is not to be mollified: 'Why should their liberty than ours be more?' she asks angrily. Luciana's reply conforms to the early modern view of gender divisons within the household: 'Because their business still lies out the door'. Man goes abroad to procure goods, wife stays at home to conserve them. But when her husband does turn up – in fact, Antipholus of Syracuse - her anger dissolves and she clings amorously to the amazed man:

Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine,
Whose weakness, married to thy stronger state,
Makes me with thy strength to communicate. (2.2.180–2)

Her view of the patriarchal structure of marriage is entirely orthodox, and the image she uses echoes the wording of the Homily on Matrimony, but in the context it is ridiculous because Adriana is mistakenly addressing her words to a man who is not her husband. Antipholus of Syracuse is baffled by the eagerness of a woman whom he does not know, but unable to escape allows himself to be taken upstairs for a private dinner à deux, while his servant Dromio of Syracuse, equally astonished by the turn of events, is told to guard the door and allow no-one in.

Meanwhile Antipholus of Ephesus is at large, spending time with his friends, a merchant and a goldsmith, from whom he has commissioned an expensive chain of gold as present for his wife; he invites them home to dine with him. Mutual hospitality is an important aspect of successful participation in commerce, where 'networks of exchange are built upon networks of trust'.[11] But when the company arrives at Antipholus of Ephesus's house, the Phoenix,

[11] Curtis Perry, 'Commerce, Community and Nostalgia in *The Comedy of Errors*', in Linda Woodbridge, ed., *Money and the Age of Shakespeare* (2003), p. 43.

it is to find the doors locked because Adriana is at her private dinner. This causes Antipholus considerable loss of face in front of his friends, and he must find a way to rescue what the merchant calls his 'yet ungalled estimation'. This he does by providing dinner elsewhere: 'I know a wench of excellent discourse/ Pretty and witty, wild and yet, too, gentle, / There will we dine' (3.1.108–11). His reputation for manliness is saved, and, in anger at his wife, he decides to give her gold chain to his mistress, a courtesan, instead.

The marriage of Antipholus of Ephesus and Adriana is threatened not only by the husband's relaxed attitude to time-keeping but also by his readiness to circulate outside the marriage what should be kept within it. The chain, a complex property in the play, with many symbolic functions, causes endless trouble. Angelo the goldsmith presents it to the other Antipholus of Syracuse, refusing payment on the spot because he plans to call at the Phoenix at suppertime and settle then. Antipholus of Syracuse is naturally astonished, especially since he is everywhere received in Ephesus with inexplicable kindness, offers of hospitality, trading opportunities and 'golden gifts', thus benefiting from his brother's high credit rating. When Angelo turns up at the Phoenix for his money, Antipholus of Ephesus is in turn astonished, not having received the chain, and when he refuses to pay, Angelo has him arrested. Angelo himself needs the money to satisfy the claims of another merchant, who has become impatient for his payment : 'My business cannot brook this dalliance', he says, and Angelo is desperate for means to pay him to keep his own credit intact: 'This touches me in reputation'. Meanwhile Antipholus of Ephesus's 'wench', the courtesan, accosts Antipholus of Syracuse, believing him to be his brother, and demands the chain she has been promised, which he refuses to give her. The chain, which Adriana, its intended recipient, does eventually receive, may stand for the bonds of marriage, but it also represents a commodity with different meanings according to the transactions in which it is involved. Traders, customers, sellers and buyers, prostitutes and wives all lay claim to it. It symbolises the interrelation of marketplace and marriage in the play. In the last act, the giddy circulation of goods and commodities comes to an end when all monies and properties, including the chain, are returned to their rightful owners. But in a final twist, the Duke of Ephesus refuses to accept the fine imposed on Egeon, which Antipholus of Ephesus offers to pay, but freely pardons the old man's life. Human life is not a commodity.

The Merry Wives of Windsor, a comedy written a few years later, in part to capitalise on the popularity of Falstaff from *Henry IV*, also concerns sex, marriage and household management, but differs from the other plays in two important ways: it is Shakespeare's only comedy set in contemporary England, and the women are far more active than the men in controlling events. The main action is propelled by the desire of Falstaff, now a city outsider in rural Windsor, (a whale thrown ashore at Windsor, as Mistress Ford calls him) and as an aristocrat in a middle-class society also a social outsider, to exploit the local economy so as to support him in a lifestyle he cannot afford. From the start Falstaff's precarious position is evident; he has alienated the local community by drunken and rowdy behaviour, and he cannot afford the rent of £10 a week – a very large sum at the time - which he is paying to live at the local inn. He is well aware of the need to act: 'I am almost out at heels' he tells his followers, 'There is no remedy, I must cony-catch, I must shift' (1.3.28–30). These are the terms of card-sharpers and thieves. Falstaff's reputation is at stake; when asked for money by his disreputable follower Pistol he refuses: 'Why, thou unconscionable baseness, it is as much as I can do to keep the terms of my honour precise . . . I . . . am fain to shuffle, to hedge, and to lurch' (2.2.20–5). His eye has lighted on the wives of two wealthy citizens, whom he mistakenly believes to be attracted to him, and means to use them to get at their husbands' money. Of Mistress Page he says 'She bears the purse. . . she is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty'. He develops the language of colonization: 'I will be cheaters [swindlers] to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me. They shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both' (1.3.65–8). He will be a 'gainer' at their hands. He sends his page with an identical love letter to each woman: 'Sail like my pinnace to these golden shores'.

But the two wives have an agenda of their own, and no intention of allowing themselves to be used to support Falstaff's failing economy or of permitting his assaults on their domesticity to succeed. They soon realise his intentions, and make use of a third woman, Mistress Quickly, to help in ridiculing and exposing him. Quickly raises his hopes by tantalising tales of the wives' sexual interest in him, and of their control over their husbands. Of Mistress Page she says, 'Never a wife in Windsor leads a better life than she does: do what she will, say what she will, take all, pay all, go to bed when she

list, rise when she list, all is as she will' (2.2.110–8). That it is women who control the domestic economy is further suggested by Quickly's own role as housekeeper to the absurd French Doctor Caius, whose household she runs to her own advantage, emphasising the material processes involved: 'I keep his house, and I wash, wring, brew, bake, scour, dress meat and drink, make the beds and do all myself' (1.4. 89–91). In this play house-keeping bestows power. In farcical scenes, Falstaff's visit to Mistress Ford's house for seduction is abruptly terminated by the untimely arrival of her pathologically jealous husband, and, as pre-arranged by the women, Falstaff is concealed in a basket of dirty linen and carried out to be thrown in in the river for washing. His humiliation takes the form of orderly housekeeping - his body is identified as foul laundry in need of cleaning. At his second visit Falstaff is obliged to escape by dressing up as an old woman and being beaten as a witch. The wives are satisfied by this punishment and Mistress Page concludes: 'The spirit of wantonness is sure scared out of him. If the devil have him not in fee-simple, with fine and recovery, he will never, I think, in the way of waste, attempt us again' (4.2. 198–201). 'Waste' here, means damage to property; in a legal metaphor she is saying that the devil now has absolute possession of Falstaff, with no possibility of his being released. It is a variation on Petruccio's claim in *The Taming of the Shrew*– 'She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house, / My household- stuff'. The jealous Master Ford, hearing about Falstaff and the linen basket, realising he has been tricked by his wife and the privacy of his house violated, exclaims bitterly against the trap of domesticity: 'This 'tis to be married, this 'tis to have linen and buck baskets!' (3.5.132–3).

Mistress Page's image of 'waste' points to an underlying contradiction in the play's ideology. The wives appear to triumph as housekeepers in this play. Even the Queen of the Fairies, impersonated by Quickly in the play's denouement, is styled (with a nod to Queen Elizabeth) a good housekeeper: 'Our radiant queen hates sluts and sluttery' (5.5.46). (In the Quarto version of this play 'sluttery' is replaced by 'sluttish huswifery'). But in the second strand of the play's action, which concerns sweet Anne Page, Mistress Page's marriageable daughter, female control over financial resources is clearly compromised. Anne is an heiress and thus represents a valuable commodity which must be disposed of so as to bring in maximum profit to the Page family. She will inherit £700 from her grandfather when she turns seventeen,

and more is to come from her father. 'I know the young gentlewoman, she has good gifts', says Justice Shallow, who wants her to marry his nephew, Abraham Slender. 'Seven hundred pounds, and possibilities, is goot gifts' (1.1.56–9), the parson Evans acknowledges. Any personal qualities Anne might possess are subsumed into the fact of her wealth. Slender himself, though very foolish, comes of a wealthy family and is the preferred suitor of Anne's father, but her mother dismisses him bluntly : 'That Slender, though well landed, is an idiot' (4.4.85); her candidate to marry her daughter is the Doctor Caius, Quickly's employer, who is 'well moneyed' but also brings in social capital - 'his friends [are] potent at court' (4.4.88). Anne's own choice is the young and attractive Master Fenton – 'he capers, he dances, he has eyes of youth, he writes verses, he speaks holiday, he smells April and May' (3.2.61–2) – but her father dismisses him as a 'gentleman . . . of no having', and 'of too high a region'(3.2.65–6), too socially elevated for marriage to the daughter of a citizen. He has no money to speak of, and Page, a man who controls his own fortune is not prepared to have Fenton use it to repair his. Anne Page deceives her parents to get her own way and marries Fenton, who declares that although he originally courted her 'as a property', he fell in love with her and 'found thee of more value / Than stamps in gold or sums in sealed bags', adding 'And 'tis the very riches of thyself / That now I aim at' (3.4.15–8). Financial terminology has been reapplied. After the revelation of Anne's surprise marriage, Master Ford sums up the situation: 'In love the heavens themselves do guide the state: / Money buys lands, and wives are sold by fate' (5.5.227). According to the conventions of romantic comedy, dealings involving property are separated from those involving marriage. Yet, despite Anne's control over her own fortune and the wives' over their domestic economies, this apparent subversion of patriarchy is ultimately contained: the reality is that the wives' chastity – and their bodies - belong to their husbands. Mistress Page and Mistress Ford make choices, but in safeguarding their households they are preserving their husbands' property. The social and economic facts of the situation are that Anne's money descends to her from her father and grandfather; and when she marries it will transfer to her husband.

The domestic economy of *King Lear* also involves daughters, dowries, and inheritance, at least initially, when Lear's decision to abdicate and divide his territories between his three daughters according to the quantity of love

they express for him results in his disinheriting his youngest daughter, Cordelia, because she will only offer a measured amount: 'I love your majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less' (1.1.92–3). Enraged by her speech, Lear disclaims his kinship with her and banishes her from his kingdom. One of her two suitors refuses to pursue his claim because she has no dowry and, as her father says, 'her price is fallen' (1.1.198). By contrast her other suitor, the King of France, will take her literally at face value – 'She is herself a dowry' (1.1.243). This decision, and the ambiguous implications of a terminology that is at once emotional and financial, look ahead to the ideas around the revaluation of material possessions that will inform the play's moral stance.

Cordelia banished from England, Lear moves to the house of his eldest daughter, Goneril. He has given up his own house, and intends to divide his time between his two older daughters who are expected to provide for him. Central to the play's dynamic is the struggle for control of the household; the idea of the house itself has a range of meanings. The play features two houses and households: the Earl of Gloucester's, and that of Goneril and her husband Albany. Although Lear in abdicating says he will divest himself of 'rule, interest of territory, cares of state' (1.1.49–50) he says nothing of his house as a material entity. He does however take part of his household with him when he goes to stay at Goneril's house, a large entourage of 100 knights. The household of an aristocrat could be very large at this time: for example, the Earl of Leicester had between 100 and 150 servants on his payroll.[12] But Lear's knights are not servants and do not contribute to the running of Goneril's house, but rather constitute an economic drain on it. Nonetheless, Lear assumes authority, punishing Goneril's household servants, disrupting household routines, issuing commands in a way that highly offends his daughter. 'Idle old man,' she calls him, 'that still would manage those authorities / That he hath given away' (1.3.17–9). He is not prepared to accept a diminution in his status or to regulate the conduct of his knights, who, Goneril claims, debase her household, making her court 'more like a tavern or a brothel / Than a graced palace' (1.4.236–7). Father and daughter quarrel over the knights, whom he refers to as 'men of choice and rarest parts' and she calls disordered rabble, who pose a threat to

[12] R.C. Richardson, *Household Servants in Early Modern England* (2010), p. 64. Richardson shows that this number was by means unusual.

her authority. The house becomes a 'highly contested space'[13] over which father and daughter compete for control; he loses the competition and leaves the house in a rage, to seek out his second daughter Regan, who he confidently expects will be 'kind and comfortable'. Lear's Fool is the first to mention what peril Lear has put himself in by giving up his own house:

> FOOL: Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?
> LEAR: No.
> FOOL: Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a house.
> LEAR: Why?
> FOOL: Why, to put's head in, not to give it away to his daughters and leave his horns without a case. (1.5.25–30)

The house is not simply a material possession, a sign of status, but a symbol of society's protection, which even the lowliest forms of life require for survival. 'He that has a house to put's head in has a good headpiece [brain]' (3.2.25), the Fool remarks later. But Regan has cunningly decided to vacate her house for the time being, and to avoid having to entertain her father by taking up residence instead at the house of the old Earl of Gloucester; Gloucester's own house is already under threat because he has been persuaded to believe, mistakenly, that his older son, Edgar, is plotting against his life. (The threat in fact comes from his younger son Edmund, but it takes a long time and much suffering before Gloucester discovers this.) He cannot refuse to entertain Regan and her husband, the Duke of Cornwall, because Cornwall is his social superior, but the entry of these uninvited guests into his home is his undoing. When Lear also arrives at this house, demanding to speak with Regan, Gloucester is apologetic for the imperious conduct of his guests, and uncomfortably subservient to Cornwall. Lear confronts Regan, who defends Goneril's conduct and urges Lear to return to her and apologise. Lear is outraged:

> Ask her forgiveness?
> Do you but mark how this becomes the house?
> [*Kneels*] Dear daughter, I confess that I am old;

[13] Gerald V. De Sousa, *At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (2010), p. 38.

Age is unnecessary. On my knees I beg
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed and food (2.2.341–5)

His mocking act of kneeling to his daughter is a visual symbol of the inversion of order; 'house' here signifies family or lineage, and Lear means that his gesture is made ironically, being completely inappropriate to his status both as king and father. But inside Gloucester's dwelling further meanings of the house are reversed. Regan and Cornwall arrive as guests but take over control, and the practices of hospitality are subverted in appalling ways. They bar the door to Lear at the end of Act 2 and turn him out into the storm. 'This house is little', says Regan; 'the old man and's people / Cannot be well bestowed'. 'Shut up your doors', counsels her husband (2.2.477–8, 498).

Once Lear is definitively outside, he comes to understand the vulnerability of 'unaccommodated man' who has neither clothes nor housing:

Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? (3.4.28–32)

He takes shelter in a hovel, accompanied only by a remnant of his once great entourage, where Gloucester ventures out to offer him 'fire and food', the most basic of human needs. Here he encounters a naked beggar (in fact, Edgar in disguise) whom he regards as the embodiment of humanity without value, 'a poor, bare, forked animal'. Here indeed a man's life is 'cheap as beast's' (2.2.457). In this anti-pastoral play, nature offers no hospitality. When Gloucester returns to his own house, it is no longer a home for him but as Kent styles it, 'this hard house - / More harder than the stones whereof 'tis raised' (3.2.63–4). Cornwall and Regan have taken over, like the intrusive cuckoo in the Fool's song, who kills the bird whose nest it invades ('The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long / That it's had it head bit off by it young', 1.4.206–7) and begin to torture the old man. He begs for their mercy: 'I am your host; / With robber's hands my hospitable favours / You should not ruffle thus' (3.7.39–41). It is in his own house, and by his own guests, that Gloucester is tied up and

blinded, before being, like Lear, in Regan's words, 'thrust' out.

In this play the breakdown of society is imaged in the assault on domesticity. Domestic roles are reversed, between children and parents, wives and husbands, guests and hosts. The rules and customs regulating behaviour within a house are broken by those who do not honour the bonds and obligations of kinship or the conventions of social order. *King Lear* offers an extreme vision of such breakdown in which, rather than acknowledging the social and economic need to uphold such bonds, humanity, in Albany's words, 'must perforce prey on itself, / Like monsters of the deep'. In the comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew, The Comedy of Errors* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the upkeep and stability of the household is sometimes threatened, but always in the end reconstituted. In *The Taming of the Shrew* the unruly Katherina, an unvendible commodity, is transformed into a model wife and desirable social asset. In *The Comedy of Errors* marital affection and valuable properties go astray, but return through the processes of market circulation (and a bit of help from the complexities of the plot) to their rightful owners. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* women control household spaces to their own satisfaction, even if their social roles are ultimately defined by the rules of a patriarchal society. The management of the house and the proper use of household resources are a regular preoccupation of Shakespeare's; his plays, even, I would argue, *King Lear*, do not envisage any radical redistribution of economic resources in the service of social justice, but they do illustrate, in comic and in tragic mode, the vulnerability of the domestic economy and how easily subject to risk it is when credit, trust and worth are wrongly evaluated .

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