OUTWITTING AND OUT WORKING: FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN THOMAS DEKKER'S THE SHOEMAKER'S HOLIDAY

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ABSTRACT

Written in 1599 and performed for the first time in that same year (likely at the Rose theatre), Thomas Dekker’s “comedie” about the friendly shoemakers is in actuality a story of class and gender struggles for women of sixteenth-century London. Dekker has created several parallels throughout his play that link the secondary character, Jane, to what I argue is Dekker’s own hopefulness and support for the women of a society that neither protected their well-being nor encouraged them to seek an improved situation. In Dekker’s play, the female characters (Margery, Rose, Sybil, and Jane) negotiate their identity within an early modern patriarchal system, and they emerge from this play as independent and resourceful.

Like the genial shoemaker, Simon Eyre, who through rather shifty dealings is able to move from shoemaker to Lord Mayor, Jane is able to leave the gated “Tower Street” community and gain not only employment, but actually own and operate her own business. In my analysis, Jane’s physical movement to the “Old Change,” a community where money was minted, is an indicator of social mobility and increasing opportunities for women. Her position in the play as a business owner and her mobility within the walls of London are echoes of the same agency that Dekker bestows on his main male character, Simon Eyre. Her work in the new community
imitates what the men of Dekker’s play are doing; just as they sew or craft shoes for their livelihood, Jane is sewing for a living.

Dekker also parallels Jane with the citizen-class Rose, daughter of Sir Roger Oatley. While Rose longs for Lacy, she collects a variety of flowers (violets, gilliflowers, marigolds, and of course roses as her name implies). These she promises to “embroidery” as a crown for Lacy. Dekker’s choice of the word “embroidery” for this act unmistakably links her with the sewing that Jane is doing in order to survive. Women of the early modern period talked and sent messages to one another through embroidery or sewing; often times the pattern on a piece of work was intended to convey a particular meaning that other women (or men) recognized. The flowers of Rose’s project are a symbolic language that playgoers recognized, and this study uncovers the significance of these flowers.

I also examine the role of needlework for an early modern lady. While this activity was a suitable pastime for ladies, it was also a way to communicate and express personal hopes and desires. The most popular needlework project was the Old Testament story of Esther. Early modern women frequently embroidered Biblical heroines. Through Rose’s embroidery efforts and the naming of the main villain in the play, Hammon (the Biblical villain is Haman), I argue that the Esther narrative informs this play.

In my study of The Shoemaker’s Holiday, I pay attention to women’s roles and activities, and situate them within the play and within the framework of early modern
London. I also establish what I believe the play was offering to an early modern audience, especially the women.
This work is dedicated to my family. I want to thank my husband, Gary, for encouraging me to go back to school and follow my heart. He has been a steadfast supporter and a devoted proofreader throughout my studies. Thank you for adjusting your life and your career for me. I would also like to thank my two daughters who are the most amazing young women that I know. They have inspired me with their own work ethics in school and in life.
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Promising to craft boots for seven years without pay, Thomas Dekker’s Simon Eyre begs for the release of a trusted employee and friend, the shoemaker Ralph, from service in the army. Eyre fears not only for Ralph’s welfare, but for his wife’s economic survival given contemporary conditions in London where single women were in constant danger of poverty and starvation. When Ralph is conscripted, the gentle shoemaker urges Jane that she “must work” (1.211). Dekker himself, having been imprisoned for debt, knew all too well the consequences of poverty, and he knew the difficulties of finding work in London. Thomas Dekker bestows traits of generosity and kindness on his main character, Simon Eyre, in The Shoemaker’s Holiday. He disturbs but does not overturn the King’s ruling class prerogatives. He perpetuates the competition between the nobility and citizen classes of the Earl of Lincoln and Sir Roger Oatley, and he honors the merchant structure and festivals of the artisans and apprentices. Dekker pays cursory homage to the romantic notions of the fading chivalric attitudes of gentlemanly ways, and he even puts a touch of humor in the energetic exchange of insults between his long-
married couple, Simon and Margery Eyre. Yet Dekker departs from the rather predictable portrayals of both the pompous and comic figures of sixteenth-century drama (city comedy). *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* and Dekker’s female characters play not only at comedy, but also with sixteenth-century notions of women’s place in class and community. In Dekker’s play, the female characters negotiate their identity within an early modern patriarchal system. Although the activities they perform and the work they “do” fall under male-approved activities for women, Margery, Rose, Sybil, and Jane of Thomas Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* are outspoken and resourceful. By studying their similarities, their differences, and their relationships we can begin to see an imaginative vision in Dekker’s work, a vision where women live, work, and relate according not just to their own desires, but according to their own emotional and physical needs. The play is the success story of Margery, a tripe seller turned artisan wife; it is a love story about Rose, an elite lady who remains a prisoner because she will marry only for love. The play introduces us to Sybil, a crafty maidservant who serves herself more than she does her mistress. And, *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* is the story of Jane who loves her absent husband, but believing he will never return, resorts to hard work and a convenient marriage proposal to ensure her own survival. Written in 1599 and performed for the first time in that same year (likely at the Rose Theatre), Thomas Dekker’s “comedie” about the friendly shoemakers is also a story of class and gender struggles for women of sixteenth-century London.
The character Jane stands out as an anomaly in Dekker's work. *The Shoemaker's Holiday* explores the problems of this young non-elite woman who suddenly finds herself bereft of husband and family. As a sixteenth-century audience looked on, Jane's life seemed on the verge of unfolding in much the same manner as many of the abandoned or single women in London. She is married to an apprentice, working and living in service, and when her husband is conscripted and she loses employment—destruction seems inevitable. As Jane clings to Simon Eyre and sobs over her loss, he exhorts her to work; however, as we examine London conditions and as a contemporary audience knew all too well, employment in London was scarce and poverty was prevalent. Dekker creates Jane as a resourceful woman who is seen by playgoers as both a capable single woman and a devoted wife. As her life unfolded on an early modern stage, and as it unravels before us now, Jane was and is an independent working woman.

Equally intriguing are the other female figures of Dekker's play. These women, like Jane, have lives that at first seem typical of their social rank, yet in this play, they ultimately prove themselves as resourceful; they negotiate, sew, embroider, and emerge from patriarchal systems that seek to dictate, confine, and control their abilities and their relationships. The cast includes the boisterous Margery Eyre, wife, comic sidekick, and professional partner to the amiable Simon Eyre. Margery is crass and vain; she orders the shoemakers about with insolent remarks, exchanges insults with her husband, yet fusses over her new clothes and hairstyle when the pair become Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress. There is Rose, the
elite daughter of Sir Roger Oatley, and love interest of Lincoln’s capricious nephew, Lacy. Enduring her father’s anger, Rose swears she’ll marry only Lacy and only for love. She is romantic, and utterly enchanted with Lacy. Rose has a maidservant, Sybil, who is a companion and confidante to her mistress. Like Jane, Sybil is a non-elite woman living in a household that is not her own. However, Sybil uses her position in the Oatley home to gain fine clothing and an occasional hearty meal.

Throughout this study, I will pay attention to women’s roles and activities, and situate them within the play and within the framework of early modern London. I will also establish what I believe the play was offering to the women in Dekker’s audience as well as his own imaginative efforts to examine a changing society for women. Although functioning inside the limitations of female subjectivity, the women of this play work within these very same constraints to shape their lives. Through the strong-willed women of The Shoemaker’s Holiday, we can begin to see the changing social and economic conditions as well as the burgeoning professional opportunities for the women who inhabit the fluctuating world of Thomas Dekker’s London.
CHAPTER 2

THE SHOEMAKER'S HOLIDAY: CAREER, MARRIAGE, AND FAMILY FOR EARLY MODERN WOMEN

In Dekker’s Jane, we see an early modern woman capable of striking out on her own. Like the genial shoemaker, Simon Eyre, who through rather shifty dealings is able to move from the citizen class to Lord Mayor, Ralph’s wife, Jane, is able to leave the gated “Tower Street” community (a community of citizens and artisans located within the shadows of the Tower of London with its reputation of isolation and restraint) and gain not only employment, but actually own and operate her own business. Jane’s physical movement to the “Old Change,” a community where money was minted, is an indicator of her increasing independence. The “Old Change” is just across the street from Cornhill (and Sir Roger Oatley’s city home). Her new location at the Old Change is also an indication of not only physical mobility, but also represents the possibility of upward social mobility. Ordinarily, a woman left on her own fell into vagrancy or prostitution, moving from place to place to avoid prosecution for living out of service. However, Jane’s move lands her very near Oatley’s London home. As Jane is successful, perhaps Dekker imagines a future for women that includes self-reliance. She is a worker and a business owner; her mobility within the walls of London echoes the same agency that we see in the
main male character, Simon Eyre. The advice that Eyre gives Jane is the same advice he gives to the men he employs—all must work. Her activity in the new community imitates what the men of Dekker’s play are doing; just as they sew or make shoes for their livelihood, Jane is sewing for a living.

Current criticism of the play places the emphasis on Jane’s eventual return to her husband and to the fold of the shoemakers. While R. L. Smallwood and Stanley Wells recognize that Jane is a character with “tenderness and loyalty,” they fail to realize her resourcefulness and her ability to survive while separated from Ralph and the Eyre household (30). Marta Straznicky describes Jane as “impoverished and distraught” when Hammon approaches her in the shop (363). Straznicky even states that the remaining shoemakers “prepare to reclaim Jane” (364). David Scott Kastan contends that, “The reaffirmation of Rafe and Jane’s marriage redeems the alienation of working-class lives” (emphasis mine 330). This array of criticism focuses strictly on the notion of Jane’s marriage, her relationship with Ralph, and her reunion with Ralph. Yet I argue that Jane’s departure from the shoemakers’ group and her independent abilities also deserve critical attention.

Jane needs neither husband nor family for affirmation in Dekker’s play. Her resourcefulness lies outside her marriage and her independence resides apart from her return. While Jane is certainly loyal, she is also supporting herself through independent work. She is neither impoverished nor distraught while separated from Ralph. When Ralph returns “lame” from war, he is sure that his injuries will stop him from providing for his wife: “She’ll be poor indeed now I want limbs to get
whereon to feed” (10.78-79). However, Jane is missing from the shop; Hodge, Eyre’s foreman (who represents a version of Eyre himself), reveals that Ralph will discover Jane elsewhere “in London” looking very “brave and neat” (10.103-14). Her positive appearance indicates a successful woman capable of feeding and clothing herself. Jane is part of London’s working population whether she is joined with Ralph or not. She has been tricked into believing that her husband, Ralph, is among the dead of a recent battle. A new suitor, Hammon, has forged a casualty list with Ralph’s name on it, and Dekker’s young, sixteenth-century bride is quite capable of reading the document for herself. Jane returns only because she later learns that her husband is alive. Rather than viewing the return as an affirmation of the necessity of man for woman, I contend that Jane’s reunion with Ralph and the others creates her as a resourceful woman who is both steadfast and loyal (more so than perhaps Eyre himself). While Jane’s return certainly illustrates a loving relationship and devotion to her veteran husband, her ability to work, earn a paying wage, and her literary skills are also key elements to her character.

Through the coarse Margery Eyre, Dekker provides a glimpse of the precarious status of unmarried women in early modern London. Although Margery is Eyre’s wife (their quick but comfortable jeers indicate it to be a long-term marriage), it is the casual reference to her earlier single life that provides playgoers with an idea of just how difficult life once was for Margery. Margery herself has been a single woman alone in London; Eyre believes she should be grateful to him for providing a better life for her than she could have found on her own: “Have I not
ta'en you from selling tripes in Eastcheap, and set you in my shop, and made you hail-fellow with Simon Eyre, the shoemaker?” (7.64-71). Apparently, when Simon met Margery she was working in Eastcheap Ward, a place traditionally known as “a flesh market of butchers,” where she survived by selling “tripes,” or animal ruminants used in cooking stews (Stow 194). According to Stow’s Survey of London, Eastcheap is a “place replenished with cooks” (195). Margery’s work, selling the waste meat of butchered animals, is perhaps the lowest and dirtiest activity of all those in the Eastcheap streets.

Knowing the type of livelihood that the streets have to offer, it is Margery who makes the strongest plea for Ralph’s liberation, and she does so on behalf of the frightened and inconsolable Jane. Eyre, Margery, Jane and the other shoemakers approach Lacy to beg that Ralph, the apprentice shoemaker, be released from conscription in the King’s army. Lacy himself has just been appointed a colonel in the army, but has sent his cousin, Askew, in his place. Eyre attempts to bargain with them by offering his services as a shoemaker; he gently urges the colonel to “Keep him at home” (1.133). However, it is Margery who voices concern over the young wife who will be left behind. When Margery asks the men to “[consider] her case,” she is referring to the legal dilemma that will befall Jane (1.155). Ann Rosalind Jones points out that women living independently were in violation of a sixteenth-century statute mandating that any unmarried woman from “fourteen to forty years of age must be part of a household” (22). Susan Dwyer Amussen explains that it was rare for “unmarried adult women” to “live and work independently” (86-87). In fact,
after 1563 it was illegal for any woman or man to live out of service: they were expected to be part of someone’s household (Amussen 87). “A woman’s failure to find work risked landing herself in debtors’ prison” (Jones 22). Margery’s work as a tripe seller in the “flesh market” is alarmingly close to prostitution. In Dekker’s The Honest Whore (II), the bawd, Mistress Horsleach, and Bots, who is seeking a prostitute, discuss her collection of women as if they were meat: “We have meats of all sorts of dressing; we have stew’d meat . . . light picking meat . . . and that which is rotten roasted” (3.3.11-13). Just as Eyre plucks Margery from such a fate, Margery will attempt to do the same for Jane. As Dekker himself landed in jail more than once for debt, his play spares these women characters from similar circumstances. Margery Eyre will do her best to save Jane from the same uncertainty she too once faced on the streets of Eastcheap. Margery’s actions are brave as she directly addresses the newly appointed Chief Colonel Lacy: “Truly, gentlemen, it were ill done for such as you to stand so stiffly against a poor young wife, considering her case” (1.154-55). Although the lines are perhaps hinting at the sexual activities of a newly-married couple or even the men’s own desires, Margery’s pleas are not for Ralph. Experience informs Margery’s entreaties; she has lived in the flesh market, she has eked out an existence by selling scrap meat. Her impudent appeals to “deal not roughly with her” are intended to preserve Jane.

Likewise, when Jane begs for Ralph’s freedom, she is making the same desperate plea as her would-be protector, Margery. Although we are tempted to see Jane’s petition and her tears as an effort to protect Ralph, she is also quite clearly
concerned with her own well-being: “O let him stay, else I shall be undone!” (1.143). When the shoemakers’ pleas are dismissed and Margery and Jane also fail to secure Ralph’s freedom, we hear Jane once again express growing trepidation over her own survival: “Ay, ay you bid him go; what shall I do when he is gone?” (1.208). For Jane, employment options are few. She might find work as a housemaid in a city or rural house (Jones 21). However, if a young woman was fortunate enough to find work in a household, “she made less money than a man in service; her wages were one-half to two-thirds of the average pay for a man” (Jones 22). Jones explains that women who managed to gain employment in a household often found a husband in that same house, but many others were seduced by male employers and were fired when they became pregnant (23). Following their expulsion from service, women most often became vagrants. Paul Seaver notes, “vagrants and the unemployed flocked to London,” but found themselves competing for poor relief with the discharged and “maimed” soldiers of the conflicts with Ireland and France (88). Jodi Mikalachki explains that a woman’s “initial move into vagrancy was almost never voluntary” (56). While Jane’s husband, Ralph Damport, becomes one of the maimed soldiers returning from war, Jane herself does not join him in the ranks of those competing for public assistance. Although she is expelled from her household, Jane does not become a vagrant. Through both Margery and Jane, Dekker comments on London’s growing dilemma with the poor and destitute women of London, and perhaps Jane’s success includes not only what she is “to do,” but also what she does not do.
The interactions between Margery Eyre and Jane paint a curious picture of female relationships in early modern London. Although Margery joins the others as they plead for Ralph’s release from the army, she is the one who turns Jane out on her own. This action gets very little attention in the play, and I speculate that Dekker’s treatment of the expulsion is so casual because to an early modern audience the action itself was not unusual. Margery is not the jealous or fickle woman that so many scholars have claimed. Anthony Parr argues that Margery’s account of Jane’s departure from the Eyre household indicates a “demanding environment where Jane can expect no special consideration” (xiii). Smallwood and Wells contend there has been a “quarrel between Jane and the Eyres,” a quarrel they believe to have happened even though it remains unreported in the play so as not to “upset our regard for the Eyres” (28-29). However, I believe Margery is acting according to custom. It is important to realize that the play presents the shoemakers as a family. That being the case, a female of marrying age was ordinarily sent out to find a husband or make her own way. Jones notes that through the “putting-out system,” parents sent their daughters off to find “short-term” employment as domestics and “long-term husbands” (21). Jane and the others fully believe that Ralph will not survive the war, and she is considered a widow and once again a potential bride. If we look at the shoemakers as a family, Jane as an eligible woman, and Margery as a mother figure for the young widow, Margery Eyre’s actions are as sixteenth-century custom dictates. The event of critical interest is not that Margery expels Jane, but that Jane survives, and is actually doing quite well for herself. In fact, she prospers.
Behind Margery Eyre’s pleadings and the sharp-tongued exchanges with her husband and the shoemakers is the voice of a woman who is knowledgeable about contemporary economic conditions in London. When Margery happens upon the shoemakers “loitering” on a “Monday,” she cautions the group that the business “shall smart” from the frivolity. Although Hodge and Firk resent being “take[n] down” by such a “dame,” and Eyre tells her to “vanish,” she reminds them all that there are “more maids than Malkin, more men than Hodge, and more fools than Firk” (7.56). Margery’s declaration is a reminder to the group and to the audience that there is competition for employment in London. Her declaration is more than a rebuff to the shoemakers; it is a reminder to the group, and to the audience, that there is competition for business and employment in London. Those not willing to work are replaceable. Her remarks to the shoemakers are similar to Eyre’s own advice that Jane seek “work.” While critics have made numerous assumptions about Margery’s barbed comments as she and her husband argue back and forth, they fail to realize the informed opinion that she offers. David Bevington writes that “she is treated with humorous and sexist condescension by her husband and his workers” (112). Bevington suggests that Eyre’s “insulting epithets for her – Cisly Bumtrinkel, Dame Clapperdudgeon, Lacy Madgy, midriff, wench, kitchen stuff, brown bread Tannikin, powder-beef quean . . . brand her as a humorous type” (112). Yet although we are inclined to see Dekker’s Margery Eyre as a loud-mouthed citizen-class wife of sixteenth-century drama (intended for comic relief), she is petitioning for Jane. Margery does not attempt to strike a bargain when she asks Lacy for Ralph’s release,
but rather she points out the dilemma Ralph's departure will create for his wife. Ian Archer explains that London's wealthy population had a definite knowledge of their responsibility to the poor, and the poor had a sense of the "obligation of others towards them" (59). What seems like a clumsy appeal by Margery Eyre to excuse the apprentice shoemaker so that the couple might go about the business of being amorous newlyweds, is actually an informed reminder to the officer of his charitable obligation to the poor.

Margery and Jane not only accompany Eyre and his group, but they speak up and challenge the decision of the colonel to press Ralph into service. Margery goes so far as to openly question her husband's judgment as he promises to provide shoes for seven years in return for Ralph's dismissal from service in the King's army: "Seven years, husband?" (1.136). Although Margery's interruptions are meant to protect Jane, she is still reluctant to forfeit their precious income for Ralph's freedom. As Margery speaks up, she also apologizes for her own forwardness. Margery's voice joins the men's entreaties: "Her husband is a young man and but newly entered -- but let that pass" (1.156-57). She catches herself with the words "let that pass." Dekker's Margery is crossing the boundaries. Throughout the play, Margery uses these same words as a type of apology indicating she knows her outspoken behavior is out of place. Mary Wilcox notes that Elizabethan women were beginning to "breach the boundary between private and public worlds" (54). Although Margery's brashness is humorous, the apology erases any real insult her remarks may have carried. Even though the men deny Margery's and Jane's request
and send Ralph off to fight (dealing “roughly” with Jane), the two women have made a public plea, and Margery’s rather backward apology indicates she knows the request to be brazen. I will return to Margery and Jane’s rather bold request later in this paper.

Simon and Margery are serving as parents not only to the shoemakers, but also to Ralph and Jane. Indeed, they are almost parental in their interactions with the couple. Simon not only pleads for Ralph’s release from conscription, but he also boasts that the young cordwainer is a “proper shot”; if Ralph must go (and go he must), Eyre encourages his protégée to “Fight for the honour of the Gentle Craft, ... fight, my fine boy” (1.214-19). Though Eyre’s eulogy is meant to buoy the reluctant soldier, it also expresses his hope that Ralph can bring honor and respect to their family-like group and profession. The brief speech is not unlike Lincoln’s lecture to his nephew, Lacy, that he turn his “wayward spirit” to the more respectable pursuit of seeking “the King’s love” and “honourable fortunes” (1.81-84). Thus, through Margery (and her family), Dekker provides a snapshot of an early modern citizen-class female, wife, and aging couple. Dekker is presenting Margery as equally if not more mobile than Eyre himself. Margery has made the longer journey of the two. She is no longer living in the “flesh market”; she rises to Lady Mayoress. If Ralph stays, the young couple’s life is sure to model the older pair. However, Ralph leaves, and the audience must envision a life for Jane that may send her to Eastcheap ward to push a meat wagon. When Jane is later seen working in the “Old Change,” the change is truly exceptional. She is not “undone”; her mobility is her own doing.
Through Simon and Margery Eyre and their relationship we can better understand Jane’s departure and eventual return to the shoemaker family. Bevington contends that Jane’s return to Ralph signals a “humbly virtuous” triumph of poverty over Hammon’s “corrupting gold” (113). Yet Bevington’s argument ignores the change in social status that we see in the Eyres, and it disregards the love and devotion that Jane has for Ralph. Playgoers see both Simon and Margery as socially mobile, and despite their exchange of insults, they are a loving couple. It is through them that we come to know Ralph and Jane. Initially, Jane’s professed love for her husband and Ralph’s concern for his young wife’s well-being stand in stark contrast to the barbed remarks between Eyre and Margery. Dekker appears to be quite the romantic as all the matched couples reunite and the bantering artisan pair remains committed and intact at the play’s end. Ralph’s and Jane’s future looks amazingly like that of the older, mentor-like couple. Although the aging pair jest and chaff back and forth, Simon indulges Margery. Bevington states that although Eyre’s comments to Margery are often defaming, she remains loyally devoted to her husband (112). After he is Lord Mayor, Eyre bestows upon his wife the fine clothes and headgear she has always coveted: “I shall make thee a lady; here’s a French hood for thee. On with it, on with it – dress thy brows with this flap a shoulder of mutton, to make thee look lovely” (10.139-42). The fondly combative marriage of Eyre and his wife is also essential to the plot of Ralph, his wife Jane, and Master Hammon (Bevington 113). Departing for war and in a rare moment of melodramatic speech, Ralph presents his bride with a pair of handcrafted shoes. “Rich men,” he
tells Jane, “give their wives rich gifts” (1.229). At his best, Lord Mayor Eyre fondly refers to his wife as “my sweet Lady Madgy,” and the romantic exchange of love and promise between Ralph and Jane finds its model in the elderly couple (17.12). Although Jane has the opportunity for wealth (and expensive clothes and shoes that Hammon gives her for their wedding day) and a higher social position with Hammon, she “choose[s]” love: “Whom should I choose? Whom should my thoughts affect but him whom heaven hath made to be my love?” (18.56-57). When Jane chooses Ralph over Hammon, she is not necessarily turning her back on Hammon’s gold; she is, rather, embracing love.

Like Jane, Rose Oatley proves herself a resourceful and independent young woman who maintains power and choice in her relationship with her absent lover. Again, recent criticism overlooks the importance of this early modern female character. Although scholars agree that she and her love interest, Lacy, are struggling to affirm a relationship like Jane and Ralph, they ignore the connection that Dekker creates between Rose and Jane. Forbidden to see Lacy, Rose is confined within the walls of her wealthy father’s garden. While she frets for Lacy, Rose collects a variety of flowers (violets, gillyflowers, marigolds, and of course roses as her name implies). Richard Mabey, editor of Thomas Hyll’s sixteenth-century gardening manual *The Gardener’s Labyrinth*, notes that, “Flowers were the symbols and motifs of the age” (6). The “power of the plants over the senses and emotions” are what Hyll most admired as he collected and published gardening instructions for his contemporaries (Mabey 8). Rose promises to embroider her collected flowers
into a crown for Lacy. Her floral choices announce her own emotional feelings for Lacy, but also suggest that she has control over his “senses and emotions.”

Although they are of different classes, Jane and Rose are in similar, yet ironically different situations. Jane represents a class of women ordinarily crushed by an over-strained system of poor relief. Archer explains that the agencies of poor relief were inadequately equipped to deal with the ever-increasing number of those seeking assistance (9). Rose represents a class of women who is not touched by threats of economic or social deprivation; however, holding onto that status requires submission in all matters, even those of the heart. Rose Oatley, the Lord Mayor’s daughter, laments for Lacy, whom her father disapproves of, and who she fears is fighting with the army in France. In her lover’s absence, Rose relaxes by the "flow'ry bank" and entwines a "garland" of "these pinks, these roses, and these violets" for her "Lacy's head" (2.1-5). Rose is resting in the tranquil and pastoral setting of her wealthy father’s estate, yet she is a captive there, imprisoned “as a thief” (2.11).

While most of Dekker's play takes place within the streets and shops of the commercial city (e.g. Tower Street), he comfortably ensconces Rose (as her name implies) in her father's garden. She "laments," "pines," and "[woes]" for her lover; she curses her "unkind father" and the sylvan area she claims has "imprisoned" her. Although Rose aches for her missing love, who turns out to be hiding and masquerading nearby, she is not in the same perilous predicament as Jane is. While Rose broods at her father’s country estate in Old Ford (“Here must I languish”), Jane sobs as Ralph is lead away, and wails that she will indeed be “undone” (1.143,
22.14). Perhaps behind Rose's protestations of the harsh garden is the ironic voice of Dekker who knew all too well what it meant to "languish" in prison.

Not only is the garden scene critical in establishing the discrepancy of class position, but it also asks us to contemplate the equality of such class structures. The scene immediately follows the impressment of Ralph into the army and Jane's ensuing fear that she will be "undone" (1.143). When Jane, Ralph, and their supporters approach Lacy, they have entered another world. There are no city streets and there is no familiar cordwainer's shop. The common shoemakers have left Tower Street with its familiar storefronts and houses; Dekker has temporarily removed the group from their workshops and deposited them in front of the elite, and now they must plead for Ralph's release from military service. The shoemakers' are rendered powerless outside their own city streets, and Dekker places Rose's wailing claims of imprisonment beside Jane's realistic and desperate position. We see both women as abandoned and victimized. Rose is separated from Lacy through her father's interference, and Jane is separated from Ralph when Lacy denies his release. The agony of departure is clear for Jane; she sees Ralph with his "piece" (firearm), and she listens as her friends beg for his dismissal: "All we come to be suitors for this honest Ralph. Keep him at home" (1.132-33).

By juxtaposing the circumstances of these two women, Dekker points to a social double standard. Russ McDonald explains that most people of the early modern period "did not object to a class system per se, but rather to the injustices that it could breed" (275). In The Shoemaker's Holiday, the separation between
Rose and Lacy is due only superficially to the war. Lacy’s uncle secures an officer’s commission for his young nephew (an obligation which the clever Lacy is able to avoid). Jane’s husband, Ralph, is of a lower class than Lacy, and has no choice but to fight in the war that rages somewhere in France. The almost certain destruction that both Jane and Ralph face is far from a comic portrayal in the story of a jovial shoemaker and his silly workmen. While Rose rests, reclines, and "[languishes]" for Lacy, Jane sobs, listens, and watches as the group’s entreaties are denied and Ralph marches off to war and out of her life. The difference between Rose and Jane becomes all the more glaring when their absent lovers reappear. To gain access to Rose, Lacy disguises himself as Hans, a Dutch shoemaker. When the shoemakers celebrate Simon Eyre’s rise to sheriff, Hans joins the others in a happy morris dance, while Ralph, reduced to a maimed and threadbare soldier, lumbers about in an effort to rejoin the happy group.

The pursuits that the two women undertake during their lovers’ absences are further indications of the differences in their social circumstances. Although Rose worries for Lacy’s safety, she remains idle. She has time to fashion a wreath of endearment for her lover’s head, and she has a maidservant to track the whereabouts of the vanished and much-missed Lacy: "Get thee to London, and learn perfectly whether my Lacy go to France or no" (2.52-53). Her father’s wealth cushions her from the harsh realities that Jane must endure. Jane’s very words imply action over idleness: “what shall I do when he is gone?” (1.208). Her fears are genuine, and extend not only to Ralph, but to herself as well. Jane’s instincts are strong, and as
she cannot save Ralph from the war she knows she must "do" something to save herself.

Dekker's association of Rose and Jane becomes apparent not only through Jane's language, but also through the actions and language of Rose. As Rose weaves the floral crown for Lacy, she fancies it to be the "fair embroidery of his coronet" (2.5). Playgoers can see the delicate hands of Rose as she meticulously braids the flowers. Her efforts are a labor of love in honor of Lacy, and are what Susan Frye in her article "Sewing Connections: Elizabeth Tudor, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth Talbot, and Seventeenth-Century Anonymous Needleworkers" refers to as the sewing together of familial and imaginary alliances that were customary among the merchant and gentry classes (174-75). Dekker's choice of the word, "embroidery," for Rose's activity binds her work with the actual shoemakers' labor, but perhaps more specifically it ties her to Jane who begins to card, spin, or otherwise sew to survive.

In the absence of their lovers, Rose and Jane begin to fill different roles in the city economy. While Rose remains her father's daughter (she gathers and braids nature's furnished flowers, and she consumes the feast with Hammon, and later with the shoemakers), Jane assumes the role of a producer. Her hands are what will keep her from a life of desperation. Jane's survival, not a "coronet" of flowers, depends upon her "fine hand." The fatherly Eyre advises his young charge, "these pretty fingers must spin, must card, must work" (1.211). After Ralph's departure, Jane is separated from the group, a group that has offered both familial and protective
relationships for her. Margery has sent Jane away ("I checked her") explaining to the surprised Ralph that the young bride "grew more stately than became her" (10.85-87). Of course, it is Margery who grows stately in the play, inquiring of the journeyman Hodge where she might obtain a new hooped skirt ("farthingale"), and seeking ways to "enlarge [her] bum" (10.35-36). However, Jane's earlier prediction that she will "be undone" finds no place in Dekker's play (1.143). When next we see Jane, her once "white [hands]" are laboring in the shop at the "Old Change" as seen and related by Hammon: "How prettily she works!" (12.13). Jane's "pretty hand" is also busy producing and contributing to the community's economy (12.15-16).

By finding new employment, Jane then overcomes societal constraints for early modern women. As mentioned earlier, vagrancy was a problem in sixteenth-century London. Mikalachki states that according to the pamphlets circulating in early modern London masterless men and women were regarded as vagrants (53-56). Once a woman was expelled from her household, she was "virtually barred from reentry into social and economic networks, falling victim to prosecution for living out of service when they attempted to support themselves by casual work" (Mikalachki 57). However, even though Jane is masterless, she does not fall into vagrancy (although her initial tears and pleadings indicate that is precisely what she fears). Her work replicates men's labor in the play; just as they are crafting or sewing shoes (i.e., clothing) and earning a living, so too is Jane.

Jane's work both sustains and identifies her much as the men in the play are identified by their work. When Hammon, the wife-seeking gallant, is rebuffed by
Rose, he decides to turn his attention to the female shopkeeper of the Old Change. She, of course, turns out to be the displaced Jane. Using a fictitious list of dead and wounded soldiers, Hammon is able to convince a reluctant Jane that Ralph has perished. Only then does she begrudgingly agree to marry him. As a wedding gift, Hammon decides to have the shoemakers craft Jane a new pair of shoes sized to perfection from the ones she is currently wearing. Ralph recognizes the shoes that are a mark of his craftsmanship ("seamed by myself"), and learns of Jane’s upcoming marriage to Hammon (1.233). Just as Ralph is identified in the play by his craftsmanship, Jane is identified by her own work in the Old Change shop. Her reputation as a business woman and breadwinner in her own right is known not only by Hammon, but by the other shoemakers as they instruct Ralph as to his absent wife’s whereabouts when he returns from war. Jane’s role as a working woman saves her from the fate of so many London women of the time. Whether she is working as a seamstress (as perhaps her offer to sell fabric, shirts, and bands to Hammon indicates) or carding and spinning as Eyre advises, Dekker clearly shows us a self-employed female in a culture that allowed little chance for success to a woman expelled from her household. When discovered and pursued by Dekker's "Petrarchan-like lover," Hammon, Jane is a worker, a producer earning her own livelihood (Straznicky 363).

Unlike Jane, her prosperous counterpart, Rose, has someone upon whom to rely, her maid, Sybil. Through the association of Rose and Sybil we gain yet another insight into early modern female relationships, resourcefulness, and independence.
Rose and her maidservant form what Susan Frye and Karen Robertson refer to as a "female alliance": a female alliance is any deliberate association between women including kinship, employment situations, educational and religious connections, and relationships of conflict (Preface vii). Sybil is maidservant to Rose; she is a companion, an employee, and a subordinate to her mistress. The two women gossip privately in the garden where Rose is being held. The gossip provides a medium where exchanges both private and public can be made (Hendricks 261). Archer explains that early modern Londoners were "well-informed about each others behavior" (76). He goes on to note that London housewives exchanged information in doorways and street shops. From the doorway, Sybil has observed Lacy dressing and behaving strangely; she has seen him in town wearing "feathers" and "precious stones and jewels" (2.26-27). Confined to the garden, Rose must depend on Sybil to reveal the day's gossip to her that she gathered from the doorway of Oatley's Cornhill home: "Are you grown humorous? Thought I – and so shut the door, and in I came" (2.33-34). Sybil acts as a go-between for Rose and Lacy, the bearer of gossip, for her "young mistress."

Sybil is a single female trying to survive in early modern London. Her job as maidservant in the Oatley household is typical employment for an unmarried non-elite woman. Conceivably, Sybil comes to the Oatley home because serving in a London household was "mandated for any unmarried woman from fourteen to forty years of age by a London statute passed in the fifth year of Elizabeth’s reign" (Jones 22). Jones explains that frequently young women left their homes to serve in large
London households via the “putting-out system” through which their parents hoped they would find long-term husbands as well as short-term employment in the city (Jones 21). As a maidservant, Sybil can expect no special treatment from either her master or her mistress. She will receive meager pay (one to two pounds per year), likely face sexual abuse (abuses were common), and vagrancy if she accuses her abuser (Jones 22-23). Writing from her one-time position as a domestic servant, Isabella Whitney frequently comments on unemployment and the poverty that accompanies being out of service. In “To her Brother,” Whitney writes, “The losse I had of service hers, I languish for it styl.” In The Gentlewoman’s Companion, by Hannah Woolley, she advises maids to “Be modest in your deportment, ready at her call.” Whitney’s poem suggests that suffering comes from being out of service. The poems mourn a lost position and instruct the maid to do everything in her power to please her mistress and retain employment. The powerful persona in each poem is the unnamed mistress, the employer; the suffering and languishing persona is the maidservant.

However, Dekker’s Sybil seems to be the one in control of the exchange between her and her mistress, Rose. In exchange for a “cambric apron, Romish gloves, a pair of purple stockings, and a stomacher!” she will “go jiggy-joggly to London” (2.60-63). Although Sybil is a servant in the Oakley household, she still manages to trade her “pains” for fine items that will give her the appearance of a higher social rank. “A person’s clothing revealed at a glance the social class to which he or she belonged” (McDonald 275). “The wearing or carrying of gloves by
either sex was a conspicuous mark of rank and ostentation" (Digby 77). The purple-colored stockings Sybil covets are an expensive item and normally only worn by those who are “born to the purple,” or royalty (it is even unusual that Rose owns such a pair of stockings, but it is perhaps a further indication of the length Oatley is willing to go in order to construct her as an elite lady) (Schneider 112). While Sybil adds a touch of comic relief to Rose’s swooning appeals for information of Lacy, the non-elite maidservant is the one who gains the advantage over her mistress. While Margery Eyre gains a French hood and a farthingale to indicate her new position as Lady Mayoress, Sybil manages to acquire clothing that disguises her position as a servant. The clothing she bargains for dresses her as one of the elite, and as someone no longer dependent on employment as a domestic.

Although Rose is hidden away by her father, she is able to hold a secretive conversation with Sybil, who has easy access to her mistress. In Oatley’s eyes, the two women’s relationship is not a suspicious association. Even though she must trade away her finery, Rose is able to use her female relationship with Sybil (a relationship that has her father’s approval) to gain information about Lacy. Despite her status as a maid, Sybil is a female confidante for Rose and the two form a critical alliance. Rose trusts Sybil with an important errand, but she also trusts her with “intimate revelation and commentary,” and she does so under the guise of a female alliance that averts her father’s suspicions (Hendricks 261).

Dekker’s placement of Jane as a producer, shopkeeper, and as a female who is utterly on her own significantly departs from the traditional positioning of a
sixteenth-century non-elite woman. In Dekker’s Jane, we see an early modern female who is truly on her own and is able to work, own a business, and function without a husband, and without a female alliance. Seaver states that, “Jane, pictured in these later scenes as an independent entrepreneur . . . is not anomalous,” since wives and widows of freemen were legally permitted to open shops (98-99). But this argument ignores the fact that Ralph is not a freeman; he is conscripted as “a young man” and he is “but newly entered” (1.157-58). Ralph refers to Eyre as “master,” and he has only just begun his apprenticeship. With her husband gone, Jane no longer appears as married, yet she is not the widow of a freeman. Her uncertain marital status places her outside the possible role of a maidservant or domestic. Although Jane and Margery are the only women in the shoe shop, and despite the possibility that the two might have formed a mother/daughter relationship or perhaps a female alliance similar to Rose and Sybil, Margery ejects Jane from their group. Margery’s actions, while viewed as harsh by modern standards, are not unusual for a woman of her position. “Women’s alliances were often temporary—and included conflict as well as union. Women in early modern London had few institutional structures beyond the family to guarantee continuity of connection” (Frye and Robertson 5). Jane is alone; in fact, she has been exiled or put out; her female alliance is one of conflict and perhaps competition with Margery Eyre.

Although the distance is but a few city streets, Jane’s movement inside the city represents dramatic social change and autonomy for Dekker’s female character. Jane is mobile; she has left the strongly-gated Tower St. community with its
watchful Tower of London and huge “Iron gate[s]” (Stow 46). The Tower, as Stow characterizes it, is a “most strong palatine Tower, whose turrets and walls do rise from a deep foundation, the mortar thereof being tempered with the blood of beasts” (42). Stow describes the many gates that surround the Tower: “the west gate of this tower the same as the most principal. . . bulwarks and gates to the north. . . on the south side is a large water gate. . . and towards the east is a great and strong gate” (46). The gates provide entrance and exit points from the Tower to the surrounding community. Stow recounts centuries old stories of the Tower’s legacy, recalling occasions when prisoners attempted an escape from the Tower’s bulwarks by roping together “hangings, sheets, etc.” into a makeshift ladder in hopes to gain freedom (47). As we examine the restraint this gated-community represents and the threat the Tower embodies, Jane’s migration from the Tower Street stronghold to the Old Change (where currency is manufactured) is all the more remarkable. The linking together of the sheets is analogous to the braided flower garland Rose creates. The escape from the Tower is not unlike Rose’s longed for liberation from the garden and Jane’s exit from the Tower Street community.

Providing another point of dramatic contact between Rose and Jane is the gallant young Hammon. Hammon courts (or attempts to court) both Rose and Jane. When the audience first meets Hammon, he and his companion are hunting in the country; however, they are clearly city gentlemen. Hammon is a chivalrous man from the city with romantic notions and hobbies. His hunting imitates the sport of the gentry and aristocracy, and the rhyming exchange between he and Rose where
the hunting of the hart becomes the hunting of Rose’s heart further mocks aristocratic sensibilities (Seaver 97). The difference between Rose and Jane and their respective situations is heightened by the exchange in the pastoral setting at Old Ford. Jane’s urban world where she works late into the night with a burning candle stands in contrast to the blooming garden where Hammon discovers Rose. While hunting in the country, Hammon and his cohort intrude in the garden where Rose and Sybil are talking. Hammon apologizes to the pair and begins to woo the eligible Rose. When Rose’s father, Oatley, joins the bantering group, he recognizes Hammon as a preferred “match” for his daughter: “do the best I can to match my daughter to this gentleman” (7.62-63). Inviting the hunters to stay and “feast,” Oatley encourages the union. Rose is the unwilling commodity in the feast exchange. Oatley declares Hammon to be “a proper gentleman, a citizen by birth, fairly allied”; his presence creates the tension or opposition at the feast (7.59-60, Seaver 97). Rose declares she prefers “to live a maid” rather than marry Hammon. And, though Rose stops short of revealing that she has promised her heart to Lacy, she confesses she shall wed only for love: “I have made a vow, whoever be my husband, ‘tis not you” (9.36-37).

Rejected by Rose, Hammon turns his attention to Jane, and like Rose, Jane resists the entreaties of the persistent would-be lover. It is through Hammon’s quixotic observation of Jane that we learn what has become of the once-exiled, but now self-sufficient young woman. Hammon’s recognition that Jane is a shopkeeper in the city (“a wench keeps shop in the Old Change”), and Hodge’s later response to
Ralph that “thy wife, man, is in London... very brave and neat” implies that Jane owns her own business and is doing well for herself (9.51). In the play, she is not only working, but in charge. She immediately addresses Hammon as her customer, and works to strike a business exchange with the would-be lover: “Sir, what is’t you buy?” (12.22). “Jane’s resort to shopkeeping is in fact anticipated in the first scene when both Eyre and Firk encourage her to work” (Seaver 98). Eyre instructs her to “spin” and “card,” activities that contribute to the manufacture of cloth. Of course, it is cloth she offers to sell to the onlooker, Hammon, not her hand: “My hands are not to be sold” (12.26). Hammon has been watching Jane through the window of her shop: “Yonder’s the shop, and there my fair love sits... It doth me good to stand unseen to see her. Thus I oft have stood” (12.1-15). Hammon spends many a long hour watching Jane as she works late into the evenings. When he finally enters the shop to instigate a courtship, we come to know Jane not as Ralph’s wife or Margery’s alienated companion, but as a working woman.

As Hammon expresses interest in both Rose and Jane, he demonstrates that he is not seeking a mate based on class position. Hammon’s efforts to pursue Jane chip away at the class structure in place (Bevington 113). Attempting to trick Jane into submission, Hammon produces a list of dead soldiers that includes Ralph’s name. From the exchange, we learn that Jane can read. When questioned by Hammon, Jane acknowledges that she can read the offered proof for herself:

Hammon. Cannot you read?

David Cressy notes that even by the 1620s only a “mere ten percent of female Londoners qualified as literate” (quoted in Hackel 141). Hackel explains that Cressy’s study suggests that early Londoners “experienced reading primarily aurally rather than visually” (148). McDonald notes that “less than fifty percent of males could read and write at the turn of the seventeenth century, and boys were schooled more frequently than girls” (256). Dekker’s Jane proves to be one of the literate; her abilities and her obvious education presents female playgoers with a hopeful vision of successful independence. Hammon can offer Jane an easier and wealthier life; he represents an elevation in class for the young laboring woman: “Sweet beauteous Jane, what’s mine shall, if thou make myself thine, all be thine” (12.54-55).

Hammon’s exclusion from success in Dekker’s comic world is finally revealed as he reverses the terms of this exchange, conceiving of profit as predominant over love (Kastan 329). Like Rose’s, Jane’s heart belongs to another man. Neither woman is willing to exchange love and happiness for Hammon’s class and wealth. Jane’s return to Ralph is not so much a step down the social or economic ladder, but rather, her return is a choice ruled by her own heart. Later, as Ralph too turns down Hammon’s monetary offer for his wife, the non-elite marriage asserts the power of love over hostile social and economic forces that threaten to divide and degrade (Kastan 329).
CHAPTER 3

ROSE IN THE GARDEN

When we first meet Rose, she is alone in her father’s garden. The garden scene is perhaps one of the most critical scenes in the play. Rose is lamenting her fate and longing for Lacy; she denounces her father and his authority over her: “O my most unkind father! O my stars, why loured you so at my nativity to make me love, yet live robbed of my love? Here as a thief am I imprisoned” (2.8-11). To a modern audience it seems almost comical to view a garden as a prison, but to Dekker’s sixteenth-century audience a garden represented a sheltered or a secluded area. In fact, the various intricately and thickly planted areas of a garden were known as “knots,” implying tightness or something to be undone or unraveled. Thomasina Beck explains that knots were beds laid out in elaborate patterns and planted with “all kinds of plants and shrubs mingled in intricate circles” (8).

It is indeed curious that Rose envisions herself as “imprisoned” while gathering flowers in her “father’s garden.” The estate and the garden are just outside the walls of London in Old Ford, yet Rose must depend upon her maid, Sybil, for information from the city. Old Ford, according to Stow’s Survey of London, is one manor belonging to a group of properties that Bishop Nicholas Ridley of Rochester
deeded to Edward VI (432). This same bishop was latter imprisoned for a sentence of one year in the Tower of London for his opinions given at a sermon at Paul’s Cross (Stow 432). Therefore, as Dekker so often used well-known city streets and landmarks as background to his dramas, his reference to Old Ford serves as connection between Rose’s garden location and the shoemakers’ location so very near the Tower of London. If so, the garden setting serves as a fortress in Dekker’s play (not unlike the imposing Tower), and as a place that can impede a continuing relationship between Rose and Lacy.

The garden and its surrounding enclosure further illustrate the extent of Rose’s isolation. Insisting on a relationship with Lacy, Rose is twice sent to Old Ford; yet all we see of the estate is the garden, and we must wonder at the privacy and security of such an area. Settling into a seat beside a “flow’ry bank,” Rose reaches for the flowers that she will shape into a gift for Lacy. While braiding the flowers, she bemoans the high “walls” around her; she compares her treatment in the garden to that of a “thief” (2.11-12). The expensive walls constructed at her “father’s cost” offer no escape for this early modern female (2.13). Sixteenth-century gardening expert Hyll describes garden enclosures that create fortress-like spaces. He describes hedges that grow back “harder and sharper” each year, and become more massive, providing increasing security (Briefe and Pleasant Treatyse Chp III). Hyll notes that without adequate enclosures, gardens are open to the “incursion . . . done by Robbers or Thieves” (Labyrinth 11). As Hyll describes effective enclosures for the sixteenth-century gardens, the language of his book

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changes as well: "Thornes by their further growth . . . will grow to a most strong defense of the Garden or field, and a sure safeguard against outward injuries" (Labyrinth 14-15).

We can speculate that Dekker's audience recognized that a young woman secluded in a garden setting was indeed sequestered from the outside world. The garden enclosures took on features intended to protect their precious contents, and for Rose, not only to protect, but also to confine. Given the privacy and security of these early modern gardens, it is no wonder that Oatley chooses to "imprison" his daughter in the garden of his own country estate. Oatley's garden is an enclosed and protected area. The wrong sort of people are forbidden; although, in Hyll's book this statement refers to "thieves," in the context of Dekker's play it refers to Lacy who Oatley sees as a would-be thief. Rose is isolated, a captive in a flowery cell. Hyll, tells us the hedges will grow "to such a strength and surenesse, that the same will be able enough to defend the injuries both of the thief and beast" (Labyrinth 13-15).

The garden is a secluded place where Oatley can not only secret away his daughter, but it is also a place where he can attempt to control her. In an effort to keep Rose from eloping with Lacy, Sir Roger Oatley has banished Rose from their London home at Cornhill. As Oatley and Lincoln stroll about and make small talk about their young charges, Oatley contends that his daughter is "too mean," or lowly born, for Lacy's "high birth." He later confesses that he has "sent [his] daughter" away in order to prevent a relationship with Lincoln's nephew. His assurances, while delivered in feigned earnest, are really just attempts to flatter Lincoln. Oatley
has no intention of allowing Rose to marry Lacy, and he will secret her away in order

to prevent such a union. Oatley does not say that Rose is far away; he merely says

that she is "far enough." The line implies that he considers her to be sufficiently

concealed in the garden. Although Oatley is perhaps hoping to mislead Lincoln

about his daughter's whereabouts, he has indeed cleverly hidden her nearby. The

location he has selected as her hiding place is none other than his own country

garden. When Rose is in the garden, Sir Roger Oatley believes her to be at a location

that is safe from interference from her lover, Lacy.

Despite the restrictive nature of the garden, it is also represents a place of

privacy for women. The pastoral setting of the garden provides an area where Rose

and her maid are able to speak candidly. The garden in Dekker's play is used by

these early modern women for private discourse. According to Hendricks, candid

moments such as these provide an "intimate gaze into a controversial discursive

space—gossip" (261). When the two hunters, Hammon and Warner, bound into the

garden in pursuit of a fleeing "buck," they interrupt the tranquility of the garden and

they disturb the conversation between Rose and her maid, Sybil. The private nature

of their conversation and the ensuing change in that conversation after the hunters

arrive indicates that the garden is a place of privacy. Mariana, in Shakespeare's

Measure for Measure, conceals herself in a "garden circummured with brick," and is

able to replace Isabella in an illicit affair with the acting Duke, Angelo (4.1.28).

Angelo and Isabella have agreed on the garden as the place for their meeting because

it has "all shadow and silence in it" (3.1.270). The garden of The Shoemaker's
*Holiday* is secluded much as the garden of Shakespeare’s play. Dekker’s Rose imagines the garden as a prison or fortress that is penetrated by the hunters, yet she is also able to use the isolating nature of the garden as a place of privacy, an enclosed area where she can devise a plan to see Lacy.

Rose’s efforts while restricted offer a picture of a sixteenth-century female maneuvering within the patriarchal system that confines and limits her mobility and choices. The garden in Dekker’s play is a place that to a modern reader suggests comfort, but in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* it is an area of confinement, a defensive position outside the walls of London. By restraining his daughter inside the garden, Oatley hopes to extinguish the romance between Rose and Lacy, and preserve her hand for a more suitable mate. That he chooses the garden as a place of safekeeping for her indicates he believes the location to be secure. However, although Oatley views the garden as a holding place for his daughter, and Rose herself sees her father as her captor and envisions herself as the captive, she struggles from within the garden walls to reach out to Lacy. While in the garden, Rose chains together flowers as a gift for Lacy and she implores her maid, Sybil, for information about the absent lover. The garden scene suggests that early modern gardens were used for much more than flowers, herbs, or vegetables. The presentation of Rose as a captive asks us to consider the garden as a symbol of patriarchy, an enclosed fortress controlled by men. We can speculate that Dekker’s audience recognized that a young woman secluded in a garden setting was indeed sequestered from the outside world.
Within the confining knots of the garden room, Rose turns to communicate in the only ways available to her. She forms a female alliance with Sybil, and she "embroider[s] a crown (message) for Lacy. While Rose is a captive, her maidservant, Sybil, happens upon her. She addresses Sybil in confidence; their conversation is secretive and risky as Rose (against her father’s wishes) demands news of Lacy. As Rose creates a floral gift (or as her language indicates, an embroidered message) she constructs her own dialogue with Lacy. Rose’s father believes that from the garden sanctuary his daughter cannot communicate with her lover. However, the garden cell is not the impenetrable fortress that Oatley imagined, and perhaps he has underestimated his daughter’s resourcefulness.
3.1 A Crown of Garden Flowers

Rose is being watched inside her cell, yet she discovers a way to speak to her beloved. Through her floral coronet gift to Lacy, Rose sends implied messages of love, support, time, and healing, and she encourages Lacy to seek her out. Cleverly, she begins to “embroider” a garland for Lacy’s head crafted from the blooming garden flowers (2.5). Sixteenth-century playgoers (planting their own gardens, concocting their own herbal remedies, and gathering flowers for home decoration and gifts) understood the significance of the particular flowers Rose chooses for the “coronet.” The endearment Rose creates is made from, “These pinks, these roses, and these violets, these blushing giliflowers, these marigolds” (2.3-4). The flowers she selects are well-known in early modern gardens and convey special meaning for both the giver and the receiver. Rose has been sequestered in the garden; her father, Sir Roger Oatley, intends to keep her from marrying Lincoln’s nephew, Lacy. Rose longs for him, and in his absence crafts a floral crown for her would-be lover. Gerard’s popular *Herball* tells us that these flowers are used in garlands and nosegays. The flowering plants are also a reminder of just how long Rose is kept apart from Lacy, and are a further indicator of the duration of her captivity.

The flowers and the embroidery create a language through which Rose speaks to Lacy, and to the sixteenth-century playgoers of Dekker’s audience, specifically the women. Women of early modern England talked and sent messages to one another through embroidery or sewing; often, the pattern on a piece of work was intended to convey a particular meaning that other women recognized. It is
likely that the women of Dekker’s audience recognized the significance of the flowers selected from the garden as well as the act of embroidery as a system of language.

Rose is seeking a way out of her captivity, and through the language of these flowers, she is talking to Lacy, describing her location, and advising him on how to free her. Her flowers form a symbolic vocabulary. Ophelia, in Shakespeare’s _Hamlet_, discovers that her lover (Hamlet) is her father’s murderer. Driven “insane” by his death, Ophelia distributes the flowers she once enjoyed gathering. Ophelia uses flowers and herbs as a way to speak through her growing madness: “There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance; pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that’s for thoughts” (4.5.174-75). Similar to Ophelia’s flower language is Rose’s message to Lacy.

The first flower Rose chooses is the pink. Gerard’s _Herball_ tells us that pinks are of several different colors and varieties, but he groups them with Sweet Saint Johns and Sweet Williams—flowers that are “esteemed for their beauty to decke up gardens, the bosomes of the beautifull, garlands and crownes for pleasure” (599). Yet Gerard also notes that the ancient herbalist, Fuchsius, says that the juice of pinks are “profitable to waste away the stone” (597). Rose is not only bestowing a gift of love or merely fashioning a memento for Lacy, she is sending him a flower that contains the power to disintegrate the walls that enclose her. Her message is a plea for release when read in the context of the garden enclosure she describes: “Here as a thief am I imprisoned for my dear Lacy’s sake, within those walls” (2.11-12).
Although perhaps the curative power of the pink is more of a physical cure (possibly for kidney stones), Dekker’s pun can also be read as intentional.

By creating a garland crown for Lacy that includes the rose, the “languish[ing]” young captive is not only telling Lacy she longs for him, but she is asking him to come to her wearing the grandest display of love. When Rose reaches to pick a rose from her father’s garden, she selects the “most glorious flower of the world” (Gerard 1259). As she adds the flower that echoes her name to the gift, she likens herself to the most prized flower in not only the entire garden but the world. Dekker’s quietly lamenting female garden prisoner is suddenly full of identity. She sees herself as worthy. Gerard’s Third Book of the Historie of Plants begins with a poem about the rose; by all accounts, Dekker’s Rose seems to know the poem quite well. The poem in Gerard’s Herball reads:

The Rose is the honour and beautie of floures,  
The Rose is the care and love of the Spring,  
The Rose is the pleasure of the ‘heavenly powers:  
The Boy of faire Venus, Cytheras’ darling,  
Doth wrap in his head round with garlands of Rose,  
When to the dances of the Graces he goes. (1260)

The poem honors the rose as the most esteemed symbol a man can wear or “wrap” around his “head” when to the “Graces he goes,” or to his true love. With a crown such as this, Lacy begins to look more and more like Rose’s Cupid. In fact, as Rose assembles the garland, she seems to act out the popular poem and much of what her contemporaries recognized as romance. Stow’s Survey notes that during summer holidays “young men exercise themselves in sports . . . and Cythera leads the

1 Cytheras—Greek Island between the Peloponnesus and Crete; chief center of Aphrodite cult.
dances of the maidens who merrily trip along the ground beneath the uprisen moon” (508). Playgoers see Rose “lament[ing] and “pine[ing]” for her absent lover as she traverses the garden knot stooping, reaching, and plucking each carefully selected flower. She imagines herself as the beautiful Venus, a dancing Cytheras, and Lacy is her “Boy.”

When Rose Oatley selects a rose, she chooses a flower that Gerard tells us “does strengthen the heart, and help the trembling and beating thereof” (1264). Rose is telling Lacy that he must stand against her father and against his own uncle, and come bravely to her. Her gift is meant to ease his fear of the conflict. The rose is a symbol of reunification and an emblem for the uniting of opposing forces (the quintessential English flower) (Gerard 1259). Together the couple will work for a marriage union, and for an agreement between father and uncle. When Rose selects this flower, she also narrows the scope of Lacy’s hunt for his true love; she is still in the London area. Although there are many varieties of roses, Gerard notes that “all these sorts of Roses we have growing in our London gardens” (1262). The popular herbal guidebook also tells us that of all the roses in England those of the garden variety are the choice pick: “all sweetly smelling, especially those of the garden” (Gerard 1260). She is able to tell Lacy that the gift is from her, and she is not “far enough;” she is being held nearby.

The rose represents unity in England, and Dekker’s Rose represents a similar unity in the play. Dekker is likening Rose’s situation to that of the Wars of the Roses that brought civil strife to England. The emblems adopted by each side gave
the struggle its name. The House of York had long used the white rose as its emblem, while the House of Lancaster used a red rose. Just as the rose symbolizes the now unified houses of England’s historically opposing factions, “some be red, others white,” Rose speaks through her selected roses for a union with Lacy (Gerard 1260). Gerard’s *Herball* gives special attention to the rose as being “not only esteemed for his beautie, virtues, and his fragrant and odoriferous smell; but also because it is the honour and ornament of our English Scepter, as by the conjunction appeareth in the uniting of those two most rival houses of Lancaster and Yorke” (1259). Rose wants to unite with a Lacy; her name and her desires designate her as a symbol for the blurring of the class structure that separates them. Although Oatley and Lincoln do not come from the opposing houses of Lancaster and York, they are opponents in London’s continuing class struggle, and neither party desires a union with the other. Oatley and Rose are from London’s citizen class, albeit its upper echelon. The Earl of Lincoln and his wayward nephew are courtiers, but Lacy has squandered much of his fortune, and now he is performing and behaving with the middling sorts. His masquerade as a shoemaker disguises his class, blurs his association with the nobility. When Rose and Lacy are finally married with the King’s blessing, there is a unity between the citizen Rose and the courtier Lacy. Rose has been busy fashioning a gesture of love and unity, Lacy has spent the majority of the play not as a courtier, but with the shoemakers.

Rose provides the link between the two classes, and again we recognize similarities with her counterpart, Jane. Dekker’s clownish Firk reveals the true
origin of Rose’s name and her message to Lacy: “Ralph, is taken for Rowland Lacy, and Jane for Mistress Damask Rose” (18.131-32 emphasis mine). In an effort to stop the wedding between Rose and Lacy, Oatley and Lincoln break in upon the reunion scene between Jane and Ralph. Jane is dressed in her finery (provided by Hammon) for what might have been a wedding between her and the assertive gallant had Ralph not recognized her. She is well-dressed and wearing a mask; Oatley and Lincoln mistake her for Rose. While Firk’s remark is made in jest and possibly refers to the actual mask that Jane is wearing for her wedding, it is also a comment on London’s expanding social and economic barriers. Mabey notes that during the early modern period the Damask Rose was only recently introduced to Britain from Asia (15). Gerard’s Herball includes the Damask Rose as one of the most popular. He meticulously numbers each variety of rose in his book. The first rose is the White Rose, second is the Red Rose, and third is the Damask Rose, and there are dozens more that Gerard lists. Gerard describes the Damask Rose as “in stature, prickly branches, and other respects is like the white Rose; the especial difference consisteth in the colour and smell of the floures; for these are of a pale red colour” (1260-61). The rose Firk names is a neither white nor red, it is a mingling of the two colors, a faded red, a darkened white. Its newness to the English countryside is not unlike Jane’s (and for that matter, Eyre’s) new clothes and new station in life.

While Rose’s message to Lacy is not spoken language, her directive is clear to a man who has been behaving errantly. Violets “admonish and stir up a man to that which is comely and honest” (Gerard 849-50). Dekker’s Rose reveals her own
self-confidence in her identity when she selects the flowers for Lacy’s coronet.

Playgoers, aware of the virtues of plants and flowers, witness a female displaying an act of self-assuredness. By choosing the violets for the garland, she is hoping to move Lacy’s heart toward honesty. When Oatley admits that he has sent Rose away, Lincoln makes a confession of his own, revealing to Oatley that Lacy is an “unthrifty” who has squandered and “embezzled” the money “furnished” to him by family and friends. Lincoln has petitioned “his Grace,” the King, for an officer’s appointment in the army for his young nephew; Lacy is generously granted a colonel’s position in the war with France. Although they have made no joint effort, the two men have taken nearly corresponding steps in an effort to control their young wards and to prohibit a relationship between daughter and nephew. However, Lacy sends Askew in his place, and once again proves himself as anything but honest. By choosing the violet, Rose is helping to build Lacy’s character. From inside the garden walls, she attempts to control the man in her life. She wants Lacy to change, to become “comely and honest.” Gerard provides a summary of the violet’s qualities:

For it would be an unseemly and filthy thing (as a certain wise man faith) for him that doth look upon and handle fair and beautiful things, and who frequenteth and is conversant in fair and beautiful places, to have his mind not fair, but filthy and deformed. (850)

Again, Rose identifies herself as the fair and beautiful thing that Lacy must aspire to obtain. The “faire embroidery of his coronet” is more than an endearment; it is a statement of what Rose expects from her suitor. Lacy has a checkered past. By sending him the violets, Rose is stating that she wants him to be trustworthy. Rose is
asserting her own worth, and she encourages Lacy to change so that he is worthy to “handle” her.

Along with violets, Rose picks gilliflowers, a flower Gerard describes as an ingredient of a conserve thought to “comfort the heart” (590). With the gilliflower gift, Rose is soothing Lacy’s lonely heart. Although Gerard’s book describes several varieties of gilliflowers, the ones most “exceeding well known, as also pinks” is the Clove Gilliflower (590). The popular Clove Gilliflowers were “esteemed for their use in Garlands and Nosegaies, ... and planted in gardens” (Gerard 590-97). The separation for both Rose and Lacy is clearly painful; Rose is beset with grief. Her language as she gathers the flowers is full of emotion. She must “languish” in her father’s flowery cell; she is “robbed” of her love, and she “pine[s]” for Lacy in suffering and “woe.” Lacy is willing to pass himself off as a shoemaker and risk not only his uncle’s anger but also the King’s. His loneliness matches her own. Yet she cannot speak to him except through her gift, and it is through this gift that she offers comfort to her lover.

Rose’s next choice, the marigold, is also a meaningful symbol between Rose and Lacy, and for an early modern audience. According to Gerard, distilled marigolds were believed to relieve the discomfort of sore eyes, and “strengthen and comfort the heart very much” (741). Rose believes that Lacy is suffering without her just as she is without him: “For him that doth as much lament, I know, mine absence” 2.15-16). Gerard tells us that, “The floures and leaves of Marigolds being distilled, and the water dropped into red and watery eyes, ceaseth the inflammation,
and taketh away the pain" (741). When Rose adds the marigolds to the garland crown, she is drying Lacy’s tears and easing his pain. Yet perhaps she is also telling him to be steadfast in heart while they are apart.

Rose and her flowers also tell us that it is summer in the garden. As she itemizes the flowers in Lacy’s embroidered crown, gilliflowers are described as “blushing.” The term implies the flowers are indeed blooming in the garden knot. Gerard’s *Herball* places carnations, pinks and other gilliflowers in the same family; yet Rose has not selected carnations and she has already chosen the pinks. Carnations, Gerard writes, “are kept in pots from the extremity of our cold Winters” (590). “The Clove Gollofloure endureth better the cold, and therefore is planted in gardens. . . . They flourish and floure most part of the Summer” (590).

The garden and the collected flowers provide the most accurate indication of time for her father’s garden estate in Old Ford. The play does not reveal exactly how long Jane has been on her own, but by looking into Rose’s garden cell in scene two we know that the flowers are of a summer variety, yet by scene twelve, Hammon’s pursuit keeps him up during many cold nights. When he spies Jane at “work” in her little “shop” in the “Old Change,” the season has changed; he watches her “In frosty evenings, a light burning by her, enduring biting cold only to eye her” (12.16-17). As the play ends and the much-anticipated celebration gets underway, the shoemakers march off to the Shrove Tuesday (a March holiday) celebration.

The blooming flowers are an indication of just how long Jane and Ralph and Rose and Lacy have been separated. They are also a telling reminder of time in the
rise of Eyre himself. Aldermen die, and the craftsman, Simon Eyre, has a new position as Lord Mayor: “Who now by death of certain aldermen is Mayor of London” (15.15-16). While we see Simon Eyre climb from shoemaker to sheriff, and then to Lord Mayor, his climb has not really happened overnight. The flowers convince Dekker’s audience that the seasons are changing (it becomes conceivable that even years have passed). Rose is in the garden amidst the summer flowers; Hammon (perhaps warmly dressed) is seen peering through the shop window on a “frosty evening[s]” (12.16). Jane leaves the Eyre household and Ralph returns maimed and ragged from hard battles in a faraway war. They have been separated so long and Ralph is so shabby that even Jane fails to recognize him immediately. Ralph tells us, “I looked upon her, and she upon me, and sighed, asked me if ever I knew one Ralph” (18.8-9).

With the flowers, Rose marks the beginning of her separation from Lacy, and it is through her gift that we know Jane’s journey as well. Time and its passing appear and disappear as the flowers blush and bloom, and fade. Although modern editions of the play cannot accurately assign the original placement of the three-man songs, perhaps we can speculate that while Rose is plucking “blushing” flowers, somewhere in the background are three songsters crooning Dekker’s rather traditional lines of love and longing: “O the month of May, the merry month of May, / So frolic, so gay, and so green, so green, so green; / O and then did I unto my true love say, / Sweet Peg, thou shalt be my summer’s queen” (First Three-Man’s Song 1-4). The “gay” song of summer is far different from the Second Three-Man’s Song

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with its pragmatic and joyless refrain: "Cold’s the wind, and wet’s the rain, / Saint Hugh be our good speed. / Ill is the weather that bringeth no gain, / Nor helps good hearts in need" (Second Three-Man’s Song 1-4). Perhaps the song is performed when the shoemakers speak of their famous predecessor, Sir Hugh, or possibly the song is meant for the play’s end because, as Anthony Parr contends, “the song recalls the audience to the everyday world” (7). Yet conceivably the same three choristers take to the stage to serenade Jane as she stoops to her work and Hammon peers through the chilled and icy window. The flowers, the songs, and Dekker’s play itself have taken us from high summer to winter, and (with the sounding of the pancake bell) to spring.
CHAPTER 4

EMBROIDERING A MESSAGE

Rose is not only talking to Lacy through the flowers, she is also hiding her activity under the guise of needle and thread. By describing her activity in the garden as "the fair embroidery of his coronet," Rose is telling us that she is sewing. It was not unusual to expect playgoers to believe that a needle and thread existed without actually displaying it on stage. In Hamlet, Ophelia reveals that she was "sewing in [her] closet" when Hamlet comes to study her face after deciding to take revenge against his uncle, King Claudius, for murder (2.1.74). The audience has not seen Ophelia at her needlework, but we know it to be the activity she was about when interrupted by Hamlet. In Middleton's and Dekker's The Roaring Girl, Mary Fitz-Allard (disguised as a sempster) brings a basket of hand-stitched bands to the Wengrave household in an effort to hold a private conversation with young Sebastian Wengrave. Sebastian's father disapproves of Mary as a wife for his son; her needlework escapes suspicion, and she and Sebastian are able to devise a plan to fool the elder Wengrave. Lena Cowen Orlin notes that there are "so many sewing scenes in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama that it is unarguably apparent that needlework played a significant and signifying role in early modern culture" (192). She explains
that on the early modern stage, "female characters sit to sew" (Orlin 194). Rose sits by a bank of flowers to "embroider" the crown and Jane is sitting when spied by Hammon. Even though it is difficult to know whether Rose was seen by an early modern audience with a needle and thread, the language in scene two is sufficiently ambiguous to suggest that she may have actually been embroidering, and Dekker certainly creates a strong visual metaphor by using such language. "Staged sewing scenes were admittedly matters of artistic representation" (Orlin 199). Although it is plausible that the "coronet" Rose crafts is a "garland" wreath of flowers, it is also conceivable that Rose is working on a different type of embroidery project.

From the isolation and silence of the garden, Rose begins to create a gift for Lacy. By situating Rose in a garden and using the metaphor of embroidery as she works with the flowers, Dekker is calling forth what were familiar embroidered scenes for his audience. Surviving pieces of domestic embroidery unmistakably connect popular dramatic garden scenes with resourceful female characters. Figure 4.1 is a valance that recounts the story of Adonis and Myrrah. Myrrah and her nurse are talking in a garden setting; the nurse has just thwarted Myrrah's plan to hang herself because of the incestuous lust she feels for her own father. In a private conversation, the nurse reveals a plan that will help Myrrah act on her desires. The embroidery shows the pair talking and scheming in a garden knot that is enclosed on all sides and intricately laid out in a labyrinth-like arrangement. In Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, Venus is overwhelmed with desire for the handsome young Adonis and wishes "her cheeks were gardens full of flowers" (line 65). We can hear
a trace of Rose Oatley’s admiration for Lacy in these same lines. Studying the embroidered pictures, reveals a connection between the early modern needleworker and the female subjects they selected for their needlework. Many of these heroines are secluded in garden knots much like Rose at Old Ford.

Women, according to Frye, did not let the needle silence them; they chose instead to use it as an instrument of communication in the tradition of the silenced Philomel (166). Philomel has been raped by the King of Thrace. To ensure she remain silent, he cuts out her tongue. In an effort to save her sister from a similar fate, Philomel embroiders a message to the unsuspecting woman. Elizabethan women, drawn to this story, embroidered the scene of this secret dialogue between the sisters. Figure 4.2 shows the two sisters in a garden sharing the embroidered message. The needlework scenes are portraits of clever and resilient women who refused to be silent.

Given the self-reliance of the female characters chosen for the embroidery pieces, we can speculate that the women of Dekker’s audience understood that “embroidery” was an opportunity to speak candidly and to break out of silence. Through Rose and the allusion to embroidery, Dekker is introducing the possibility that his garden prisoner is working on an embroidered story of her own. Frye writes:

Women responded to the unchanging injunction to perform domestic needlework by evolving a subculture within which patterns and pictures articulated their lives. These patterns—such as the busy bee of the community worker or the strawberry of generation—and pictures—often of Diana, Actaeon, Lucrece, Judith, and Esther—formed visual expressions of narratives offering alternatives to the passivity, privacy, and silence that needlework was supposed to enforce. (165)
Early modern women carefully chose the subject matter for their embroidery projects. While the flowers speak in a language that is uniquely theirs, embroidery scenes embody the fantasies of the needleworker. Even though Rose is picking the garden flowers and perhaps embroidering a crown for Lacy, the Esther narrative also provides a framework for *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*. Of all the embroidered work to have survived, Frye identifies the Old Testament story of Esther and Ahasueras as the “century’s most popular picture,” and although Frye is speaking of the seventeenth century the difficulty of dating much of the surviving embroidery makes for a definite overlap in this early modern period (178). Parker also establishes the story of Esther as one of the most celebrated narratives of early modern women’s embroidery (96-97). Early modern women “overwhelmingly chose certain Biblical narratives to replicate in needlework pictures,” relying largely on stories of Biblical heroines in acts of courage and boldness (Frye 178). The embroidered heroines are seen in situations that “articulated action and power while acting in a context that is simultaneously political and personal” (Frye 178). Parker contends that in the embroidered pictures of Biblical scenes “we can also see how women gave their own interpretations and particular emphasis to the feminine ideal” (96). Frye goes so far as to add these women used “needlework, the supposed instrument of their immobility and silence, to place themselves in narratives that they associated with their own time as well as to connect with other women across time” (178).

Why then did so many early modern women select the Esther narrative as the subject for their embroidery work? Frye notes that, “To choose the narrative of
Esther, then, is to choose a narrative in which a female figure succeeds in public action in spite of the injunction to silence” (179). With the word “embroidery” and the verbal and non-verbal voices of his female characters, Dekker has linked the women of his play to the Biblical narrative of Esther. Esther is a female heroine who succeeds in her public plea despite her admonition to silence. Surviving embroidered panels indicate early modern women felt a kinship with the bold women of Biblical and legendary status. As late as the fifteenth century, professional male embroiderers were creating elaborate pieces of ecclesiastical embroidery known as Opus Anglicanum. This type of professional embroidery manufactured by men finds its parallel with the Biblical scenes recreated by the supposedly silenced female needleworkers. The picture in figure 4.3 depicts Queen Esther speaking before the King, and Haman is dangling by his neck in the background. To the left is the banquet scene where Esther reveals Haman’s plan. When Dekker’s “Hammon” intrudes into the tranquil garden setting where Rose and Sybil are conversing the parallel with Queen Esther becomes obvious. The character names are strikingly similar (Haman and Hammon). Jane and Margery’s presence among the men, their persistent speech actions, their intercession on Ralph’s behalf, and Rose’s protestations make the comparison all the more noteworthy.

The notion that the Esther narrative informs The Shoemaker’s Holiday is evident through the main villain, Hammon. The Biblical Haman also plots a deception based on a false letter or order much as Dekker’s Hammon produces a fictitious list of dead soldiers for Jane. Hammon is playing at sport in the world of the
nobility, yet he is a “citizen by birth, fairly allied” (2.58-59). He is maligned throughout the play; “Master Hammon” becomes “Sirrah Hammon,” and he is rejected by both the elite and non-elite of the play, finding a wife in neither group. “Firk, always the most outspoken of the shoemakers, addresses Hammon as an equal, deserving no title: ‘Look not, Hammon; leer not. I’ll firk you’ ” (Seaver 99, 18.72).

Similarly, Haman is the villain in the Esther narrative. Haman has the trust of King Ahasueras and if not trusted among the Jews he is at least known; however, he has fooled both the King and the community, and uses the royal seal to order the massacre of all Jews. Haman has attempted to make himself a part of two worlds, the King’s world and the Jewish world; when his plan is detected, he is rejected by both. In the Biblical narrative, Haman is hanged on the very scaffold he (Hamon) had constructed for the Jewish massacre. Once again, it is from the frolicsome, but wise Firk, that we hear the Biblical comparison made in jest, yet perhaps fortuitously: “And for Hammon, neither Hammon nor hangman shall wrong thee in London” (17.18-19).

Moreover, reading The Shoemaker’s Holiday in the context of the story of Esther presents an opportunity to see Jane, Margery, and Rose as bold heroines. Surviving embroidered panels most often depict the scene where Esther approaches the King, the banquet where Haman’s plot is revealed, Mordecai crouching outside the King’s wall, and Haman dangling from his own gallows. Jane and Margery’s persistence in the scene where Eyre is about to request that Ralph be released from

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2 Haman has always been associated with the high gallows. Jewish children still refer to the word game ‘hangman’ as ‘Hang Haman.’
conscription is reminiscent of the Biblical Queen Esther’s pleas to King Ahasueras that he intervene on behalf of the Jews. Managing to conceal her Jewish identity from King Ahasueras, Esther becomes the most favored wife to the King.

Considering the Jews to be expendable, however, the King’s aid, the conniving
Haman, has managed through trickery to sentence all Jewish people to death.

Esther’s adoptive father, Mordecai, has asked her to intervene on behalf of the Jews.

After much deliberation and fasting to the point of fainting, Queen Esther enters the court uninvited and dares to speak without command. Her boldness, according to Persian law, is punishable by death. Yet the brave Queen has the favor of the King and he listens intently to her pleas. She invites her husband to an elaborate feast (hoping that a sumptuous meal will soften the King’s heart to her news) where she then reveals Haman’s planned extermination of the Jews. The King abolishes the evil plan and sentences Haman to death.

Like the brave Queen Esther, Dekker’s Margery and Jane make a bold and desperate plea for Ralph’s release from conscription. The women, along with Eyre and his shoemakers, arrive in numbers to Sir Roger Oatley’s London home only moments after the young and errant Lacy has been appointed “Chief colonel of all those companies mustered in London and the shires about” (1.47-48). As Eyre attempts to approach Lacy and Askew, he must first tear himself free from Jane who is nearly fastened to him clinging and sobbing. “Leave,” he orders her. “Leave whining: away with this whimpering . . . I warrant thee, sweet Jane – go to!” (1.117-20). Eyre intends to speak to the men himself; he considers himself to be a “man of the best presence,” and the likely voice to argue for Ralph’s freedom: “I’ll speak to them an’ they were popes!” (1.125-26). His command to Jane is also an act of caution. The shoemakers have come to ask that one of their own, the apprentice Ralph, be excused from the war. Like Mordecai, Ralph cannot ask for his own
release. Eyre himself has compared the men to "popes," and he urges the others to silence. Yet despite Eyre's order that she "go," Jane remains, and both she and Margery will beg for Ralph’s release. Esther, Jane, and Margery bravely speak out in an environment where their presence is likely unwelcome. Frye contends that women used embroidered pictures as an "imaginative means to push the boundaries of acceptable female behavior to include vigorous, public, political activity" (178).

The similarities between Jane and Rose become all the more striking when examined under the lens of embroidery and Biblical heroine, Esther. The parallel between the Biblical story and the play is strengthened when we consider Rose’s refusal to Hammon while attending one of her father’s banquets. Banqueting and feasting provide an arena where Esther can both flatter and inform the King. In The Shoemaker’s Holiday, banquets likewise create a tension-charged space. In fact, not only do banquets bookend the play, but they also provide many opportunities for schemes and deceptions. As the play begins, we hear Lincoln complimenting Oatley on the fine feast the two have just enjoyed: "My Lord Mayor, you have sundry times feasted myself and many courtiers more; seldom or never can we be so kind to make requital of your courtesy" (1.1-4). Of course it is Rose’s father who invites Dekker’s scheming Hammon to a banquet in order to match his daughter with the "gentleman" (7.49). Yet while it is Oatley (and in some respect Eyre as well) who uses banqueting as a means to manipulate others, it is Rose who is headstrong and opinionated (her father’s terms) when she denies not only Hammon’s advances, but also her father’s wishes. After the feast, Rose boldly refuses the gallant even to the
point of being “obstinate” with her father: “Say, sir, I cannot. I have made a vow, whoever be my husband, ‘tis not you” (9.32, 9.36-37). Like Esther who, during the feast, boldly announces Haman’s plan to the King, Rose “cross[es]” her father after they have all feasted at yet another one of Oatley’s rich banquets. Both Rose and Jane in the end choose love over Hammon’s wealth; both women will remain true to their “vow[s]” (9.32, 9.36). We know Rose will be returning to the garden knot as Oatley once again sends her into supposed isolation and silence for her refusal: “See you convey your mistress straight to th’Old Ford. – I’ll keep you strait enough!” (9.58-59). However, just as Jane cannot be silenced with a simple “go to!” neither can an industrious needlewoman in a garden. The banquet scene at the end of the play brings Rose and Lacy together with the King’s blessing.

Whether Rose is crafting a crown or an embroidered narrative, she is doing so while being held in her father’s garden at Old Ford, and she is being kept there in order to prohibit communication and a relationship with Lacy. In effect, Oatley is attempting to silence his daughter. She is confined against her will; she may not come and go as she pleases, and she may not pursue her love for Lacy. She is, however, free to collect the flowers and embroider. While sequestered in the garden, Rose turns to embroidery as another method of breaking her silence, and she is doing so under her father’s watchful eye (2.5). Although Rose’s father is able to control his daughter’s whereabouts, he is not able to keep her from contacting Lacy. He does not suspect that she is sending him a message because her needlework is not a dubious activity.
Rose’s embroidery project escapes her father’s attention because he approves of the activity. Rozika Parker notes that in the sixteenth century, needlework began to confer education with elite class associations that were “safely feminine” (Parker 73). In order to see Rose’s actions as a secretive language, we must first understand embroidery and its role in the early modern period for both men and women. Parker traces the emergence of embroidery as a predominantly female activity to the art/craft divide of the Renaissance. Parker explains:

The fine arts—painting and sculpture—are considered the proper sphere of privileged classes while craft or applied arts—like furniture-making or silver-smithing—are associated with the working class. However, there is an important connection between the hierarchy of the arts and the sexual categories male/female. The development of an ideology of femininity coincided historically with the emergence of a clearly defined separation of art and craft. This division emerged in the Renaissance at the time when embroidery was increasingly becoming the province of women amateurs, working for the home without pay. . . . Embroidery, by the time of the art/craft divide, was made in the domestic sphere, usually by women, for ‘love.’ (5)

Parker goes on to note that embroidery was never an exclusively female occupation (Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558, and in 1561 she refounded the ancient Broderers’ Company, a band of some one hundred professional embroiders, all men). However, although embroidery was not a female profession, Parker goes on to quote Richard Mulcaster’s 1561 *Curriculum for Girls* that singles out needlework as the demarcation between girls of “high position” and those beneath them. Mulcaster writes:

If a young maiden is to be brought up with a view to marriage, obedience to authority and similar qualities must form the best kind of training; if from necessity she has to learn how to earn her own living some technical training must prepare her for a definite calling; if she
is to adorn some high position she must acquire suitable
accomplishments . . . [including drawing] . . . to beautify [her]
needlework. (quoted in Parker 73)

Oatley is trying to fashion his daughter as a Renaissance Lady, or a
gentlewoman. Needlework is in keeping with Rose’s training as a lady, training that
Rose cleverly exploits. He expects Rose to behave according to the “female virtues
of silence and obedience” (Parker 74). “Stitchery was the behavioral badge of virtue
that rendered women unsusceptible of ill report” (Orlin 191). His daughter’s
embroidery project suggests she has the “best kind of training” to be a woman of
“high position.” Throughout the play, her training and position are a concern to
Oatley as revealed through his hidden asides when he indicates his disapproval of
Lacy as a mate for his daughter: “And yet I scorn to call him son-in-law” (1.44).
Oatley is angry when he learns that Rose has run off with Hans the shoemaker, and
he curses his daughter’s foolhardiness: “Will she forget her birth, requite my care”
(16. 43). When Rose is courted by Hammon, she is no longer in the garden at Old
Ford; she is allowed to roam about talking with Hammon; however, when she
refuses his proposal, her father orders her back to her cell. By sequestering her once
again, Oatley is attempting to control her, to keep her “strait.”

Through her embroidery work, Rose retains power over her own identity.
She seeks models in popular female heroines and she instructs Lacy’s behavior.
Parker explains that, “Embroidery has provided a source of pleasure and power for
women, while being indissolubly linked to their powerlessness. Paradoxically, while embrodiery was employed to inculcate femininity in women, it also enabled them to
negotiate the constraints of femininity" (11). Orlin argues that a silent female embroider “suggests self-abnegation” (185). Parker states “the embroiderer’s silence, her concentration also suggests a self-containment, a kind of autonomy” (10). Yet, neither of these explanations describes Dekker’s Rose. Oatley’s attempts at silencing his daughter are ultimately unsuccessful. Yet to examine the act of embroidery only within the context of silence ignores the authority that Rose claims for herself when she speaks through her craft. While held in the garden, Rose is anything but self-contained. She is contained by her father, but uses her embroidery as a mode of language, avoiding both silence and obedience, and rather than succumb to her father’s wishes, Rose uses needlework as a part of her identity, a manner of self-expression not self-abnegation. In The Shoemaker’s Holiday, Rose is working on her project when she is interrupted by Sybil. However, Sybil knows the embroidery carries meaning; she mockingly asks, “I am sure you make that garland for me” (2.17-18). The embroidery project and its significance are lost on Oatley. Rose has consciously selected elements from her feminine training and used them to gain an advantage.

Rose’s project is of the home or domestic embroidery type. It is intended to not only instruct Lacy of her whereabouts, but it is also a commemoration of their love. This type of embroidered remembrance has parallels in other surviving pieces of sixteenth-century embroidery. Gostelow identifies a difference between men’s professional embroidery and that of the ladies. “Embroidery at this time was strictly segregated between the highly ornate ecclesiastical work (Opus Anglicanum) done
by men and the more leisurely work done by the ladies” (70). Like Parker, Gostelow attributes the “upsurge of home embroidering” to an increased interest in the arts.

Surviving pieces of domestic embroidery are few; however, some are included in the inventory of Katharine of Aragon (first wife of Henry VIII). The collection includes cushions and hangings made of silk and velvet with highly ornate designs. Yet as floral motifs began to dominate home embroidery and reusable patterns were created, embroidered messages (samplers) made an appearance. The earliest surviving sampler is a piece by Jane Bostocke (1598) inscribed with the words: “ALICE LEE WAS BORNE THE 23 OF NOVEMBER BEING TWESDAY IN THE AFTER NOONE 1596” (Gostelow 71). Jane Bostacke used her embroidery work to commemorate the birth of her child; through her needlework she recorded the name, the day, the month, and the time. The sampler is the language of memory, a keepsake, a family heirloom, and a written record. The surviving embroidered announcement is not an elaborate commissioned piece of Opus Anglicanum; it is a woman’s record of a special event.

Similar to Jane Bostocke’s chronicle of her daughter’s birth is Rose’s embroidered crown for Lacy. It is a carefully crafted gift, a message. The floral motif constitutes a language not unlike that of Bostocke’s sampler. “Each flower could carry a number of symbolic meanings for the Elizabethan embroiderer. Its physical qualities, its medicinal properties and heraldic associations all determined a plant’s symbolism” (Parker 71). The flowers are a likely and popular choice for Rose’s project, and her embroidery abilities are typical for a sixteenth-century lady.

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The type of project Rose undertakes is in keeping with her place at the upper end of the citizen class while Jane’s work at the lower end of the citizen class is more labor intensive. The activities of the two women further emphasizes their place in class and community. Rose is a lady of the early modern era. According to Vives, she must be “chaste, silent, and obedient,” and her pastimes should include needlework and music: “Music and embroidery were singled out as the ideal occupations for the lady” (Parker 63). Parker observes that, “Embroidery was extolled as the quintessential occupation for women. . . . Needlework, particularly embroidery, evoked the femininity of the nobility and yet suggested the service and subservience required of the merchant’s wife. By her femininity, a wife provided evidence of the status of her husband and family in society. Sewing may have suggested a pleasing modesty, but embroidery conferred a noble distinction” (Parker 62-63).

Whereas Rose is fashioned in the play as a lady, Jane occupies a lower place in the social hierarchy. Mulcaster’s description also speaks of a woman who must be able to “earn her own living.” Of “necessity,” Jane seeks a way to survive without a husband. While Rose has been taught the ways of a gentlewoman, Jane is instructed to seek hard work. The skills Eyre encourages her to use are “technical” skills that she can use to “earn a living” not a social position. Rose and Jane are performing very different activities in their respective social positions. Jane is carding (separating the fibers of wool prior to spinning) and spinning (manufacturing thread or yarn), thus producing a key component (ingredient) in embroidery; Jane, in other words, in her lower position, contributes to Rose’s ability to function as a lady.
Through the respective activities of Rose and Jane, Dekker once again illustrates the range of positions within the social hierarchy as well as the ties that connect women across that hierarchy. The discrepancy between London’s elite and non-elite is an issue close to Dekker’s own dubious economic position. Smallwood and Wells observe that Dekker’s “precarious existence on the brink of poverty and disaster, against which constant hard work is the only protection, may perhaps be seen as part of the background to *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (3). For Rose, needlework is a pastime, an activity that further sets her apart from those who are beneath her class. For Jane, spinning and carding are indeed work that sustains her. “At the lowest stratum of society the family of clothworking activities involved spinning” (Orlin 187). The work she performs is the answer to her quest for survival: “what shall I do when he is gone?” (1. 213-14). Mistress Merrythought, of Francis Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, remarks after losing her jewelry box and being denied admittance by her husband, that by knitting, she will save herself and her son from being undone: “He has undone me and himself and his children . . . We’ll go to thy nurse’s, Mick; she knits stockings, boy, and we’ll knit too, boy, and be beholding to none of them all” (4.163-85). The rather loud-mouthed citizen-class wife has just stated that she and her son will survive by their own hands. Knitting is fit work for a son and his mother, implying it is work for both men and women. The work Mistress Merrythought seeks is the type of work Jane is performing, and it is also an echo of what early modern men were doing. The meagerly paid apprentices embroidering for a living, the shoemakers stitching shoes,
and Jane—spinning and carding—all are at work. In Beaumont’s play, the audience never sees Mistress Merrythought at work. Her efforts to find employment are unsuccessful, and their situation is desperate as she and her son return home asking for readmission: “What do you think shall become of us?” (5.199). Although contemporary laws prohibited women from living independently, in The Shoemaker’s Holiday an audience watched while Jane worked and supported herself.

Thomas Dekker’s The Shoemaker’s Holiday explores the problems of a young non-elite woman cut off from her husband and her family-like group. Playgoers had every reason to believe that Jane would succumb to poverty or turn to prostitution. However, Jane strikes out on her own; she is neither prostitute nor vagrant. Given the hardships endured by sixteenth-century London’s single and lower class women, Dekker’s portrayal of Jane stands out as truly remarkable. Her journey takes her not to Eastcheap to peddle animal entrails from a dirty wagon as Margery once did; she becomes a functioning member of the “Old Change” economy. Through independent work, she supports herself in a society that condemns the masterless. Although on the surface, the play is a fun and farcical portrayal of the genial shoemakers and their kind and benevolent leader, the likeable Simon Eyre, it is also a story of independence, resourcefulness, and prosperity for sixteenth-century women.
Figure 4.1: Myrrah and her nurse in the garden
Figure 4.2: Philomel and her sister
Figure 4.3: Esther approaching King Ahasueras
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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