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0521832713 - Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy

Jennifer Panek

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WIDOWS AND SUITORS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH COMEDY

The courtship and remarriage of a rich widow was a popular motif in early modern comic theatre. Jennifer Panek brings together a wide variety of texts, from ballads and jest-books to sermons and court records, to examine the staple widow of comedy in her cultural context and to examine early modern attitudes to remarriage. She persuasively challenges the current critical tendency to see the stereotype of the lusty widow as a tactic to dissuade women from second marriages, arguing instead that it was deployed to enable her suitors to regain their masculinity, under threat from the dominant, wealthier widow. The theatre, as demonstrated by Middleton, Dekker, Beaumont and Fletcher and others, was the prime purveyor of a fantasy in which a young man's sexual mastery of a widow allowed him to seize the economic opportunity she offered.

JENNIFER PANEK is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Ottawa. She has previously held a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellowship at Harvard University, and has published in such journals as *Studies in English Literature*, *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies*, and *Comparative Drama*.

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2004

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Adobe Garamond 11/12.5 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [T_B]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 83271 3 hardback

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For Matthew

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Acknowledgments

My first thanks are due to the people who saw the earliest version of this book through the dissertation process at the University of Toronto: Leslie Thomson, Anne Lancashire, and Julian Patrick, who gave me not only an exemplary thesis committee, but a source of continued advice and support. Alexander Leggatt and Helen Ostovich, in their capacity as internal and external dissertation examiners, offered constructive suggestions; so too did Peter Blayney, who fortunately came as part of the package when Leslie signed on as my advisor. Conversations with Barbara Todd were tremendously useful in the early stages of the project: despite our different views on certain points, her interest and helpfulness are warmly remembered.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded both my doctoral and postdoctoral research: for support in the latter, thanks are due to Anne Lancashire (again), Marjorie Garber, who generously added a postdoctoral supervision to her busy schedule, and Mary Halpenny-Killip, who made me feel at home at Harvard's Humanities Center. The Renaissance Graduate Colloquium provided stimulating discussion and some truly spectacular dinners; Edie Snook provided an understanding listener and excellent company.

Christina Luckyj, best of mentors and best of friends, read the entire manuscript; her scholarly counsel is surpassed only by her wisdom on matters non-professional. Jerry Singerman, both during and after his excellent "Getting Published" seminar at the 2001 Shakespeare Association of America (SAA) conference, was a greatly appreciated source of tips on negotiating the road to publication. Jerry Sokol, who kindly allowed me access to his work before it was published, read and offered advice on "the legal bits" – any remaining errors there or elsewhere are wholly my own.

For the opportunity to share portions of my work in progress, I thank the open submissions selection committee for the 1999 SAA conference. I also thank John Astington and Domenico Pietropaolo, organizers of the "Shakespeare, Authorship, and the Canon" conference (October 2000)

Acknowledgments

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at the University of Toronto's Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama; there I had the benefit of conversations with Paul Yachnin, possibly the world's only other scholar interested in *The Puritan Widow*. Loreen Giese, who chaired the seminar "Literary and Social Practices of Courtship and Marriage in Early Modern England" at the 2000 SAA conference, provided useful information about the London Metropolitan Archives. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this book contain material originally published in *Comparative Drama* 34.3 (2000): 321–344; I am grateful to the editors for permission to reprint.

Victoria Cooper, my editor at Cambridge University Press, was unfailingly helpful, and the book profited greatly from the comments of its two anonymous readers. Mary Arseneau and Helena Merriam helped me substantially through the process of indexing. Stephen Orgel's good deed did not go unpunished; nor does it go unappreciated. Friends and colleagues in the English department at the University of Ottawa have offered enthusiasm and encouragement, and, at one point, a very welcome course release: special thanks to Victoria Burke, Irene Makaryk, David Rampton, David Staines, Andrew Taylor, and Keith Wilson. I also owe a great deal to former teachers and professors Allan Romkema, Judith Weil, and David Williams.

One couldn't write books if it weren't for the people who give you a life outside of them: I thank my parents, George and Joyce Panek, for their love and support; my sister Joy Panek; Kim Brown and Dan Wruck, who have stood by me for a startling number of years; Lynne Bowker, Heather Cullen, Chantel Lavoie, Jenny McKenney and Clifton Cunningham, Elaine Ostry, Heather Walsh, and Sarah Winters, good friends all. This book is dedicated to my partner, Matthew Kellett, with more love and gratitude than I could otherwise express.

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A note on texts

Original spellings have been preserved, but I have used brackets to expand contractions and have modernized u/v and i/j. Unless otherwise noted, all italics within quotations are original.