Women and the Market in *The Roaring Girl*

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When T. S. Eliot remarked, in 1927, that Moll Cutpurse was "the sort of woman who has renounced all happiness for herself and who lives only for a principle," his words could probably still have been understood as praise. In calling her a figure of "free and noble womanhood,"¹ Eliot in effect is making Moll an example for all women, encouraging them to pursue the martyr's course of renunciation in exchange for a distinctly feminine brand of freedom – a negation of their own desires which would leave women free to fulfill the needs and wishes of others. Today this description of Middleton and Dekker's *Roaring Girl* not only seems untrue to our experience of the play, but it also sounds like anything but praise. Indeed, more recent critics admire Moll Cutpurse for not being a figure of renunciation, for serving as an example of a woman who refuses to renounce her own desires and chooses instead to exert her presence, her own subjectivity, in a world that too often threatens to make objects of women. Paul Mulholland, in his introduction to the play, objects to some of these modern interpretations of *The Roaring Girl*, because, he says, they detract from the artistry and the impact of the play as a whole by reading it in too focused and too modern a light, often distorting Moll's "feminism" to accord with their own.² More specifically, he worries that modern critics forget her Jacobean context and make Moll a spokeswoman for twentieth-century feminism by ignoring or eliding her more traditional sentiments, as when she says, in excising herself from Sebastian's proposal, "a wife, you know, ought to be obedient, but I fear me I am too headstrong to obey" (II.ii.37), or again, in rejecting Laxton's advances, "Base is that mind that kneels unto her body / As if a husband stood in awe on's wife" (III.i.137–38).³

Based on Eliot's overenthusiastic reaction to what he considers womanly nobility, Mulholland's caution about our own enthusiasm for Moll's

example of womanhood is well taken. After all, insofar as she is set apart from her society in ways that we might admire, Moll is also isolated, a figure excluded from the comic revival at the play's end. As the two quotes Mulholland points to suggest, one of the most troubling things about this play is that Moll does not at first glance seem overtly to reject her society's vision of marriage as a male-dominated hierarchy, but rather opts out of it only for herself. Indeed, far from denigrating her society's patriarchal conventions, Moll willingly lends her hand to forward the marriage plot between Sebastian and Mary, while at the same time she openly acknowledges her kinship with Mary when she agrees to help them, saying, "I pitied her for name's sake, that a Moll / Should be so crossed in love. . . / My tailor fitted her: how like you his work?" (IV.i.66-69). In some sense, then, Moll can be seen as an instrument that the play uses to undermine exactly the subversive qualities she seems to embody. But I want to argue that even without being aware of it, Moll might also manage to disrupt even the play's containment of her. By making us self-conscious about our own participation in the play's economy of exploitation, Moll Cutpurse invites us to reevaluate our responses to her and to understand better the freedom and nobility of the tomboy figure on the Renaissance stage who ignores and disrupts her society's rigid constraint of women's subjectivity.

Perhaps the most obvious place to begin grappling with Moll's position in her society's patriarchal structure is the highly charged moment at the exact center of *The Roaring Girl*, in which she offers up what Linda Woodbridge has called one of Renaissance drama's most clear-sighted comments on the economic pressures exerted upon the women of early modern England.⁴ If Moll does manage to offer any effective alternative or resistance to her culture's exploitation of women, it will not be in her outright rejection of heterosexual marriage, since she does help to bring about that traditional comic ending, and she does seem, if not comfortable, at least reconciled to the notion that a wife should be obedient to her husband. Instead, Moll's most subversive sentiments are precisely those which Woodbridge locates at the moment in Act III where Moll, dressed as a man, physically assaults the gallant who thinks he can seduce her, and, in a roaring speech, defies all men who prey upon women as easily and as casually as they angle for fish. In Laxton's advances toward Moll, we see the assumption that women who participate in public conversation, who choose to "jest" and "be merry," are necessarily promiscuous, easy prey. And Moll's attack on him here in Act III, in effect denies her culture's obsessive equation between women's speech and their bodies, between free

speaking and loose sexuality. Speaking as if on behalf of all women's access to the public realm, then, Moll rails against Laxton, proclaiming:

In thee I defy all men, their worst hates
 And their best flatteries, all their golden witchcrafts
 With which they entangle the poor spirits of fools:
 Distressèd needle-women and tradefallen wives -
 Fish that must needs bite, or themselves be bitten -
 Such hungry things as these may soon be took
 With a worm fastened on a golden hook:
 Those are the lecher's food, his prey. He watches
 For quarrelling wedlocks and poor shifting sisters:
 'Tis the best fish he takes. (III.i.92-101)

As Woodbridge rightly points out, Moll's comments suggest an awareness, unusual in her time, that prostitution is more often the result of hunger, poverty, or need, than of greed or lustfulness in women. Several of Moll's words in these lines - "golden," "poor," "distressèd," "tradefallen," "hungry" - point to the economic concerns that will continue to inform her crusade throughout the play. And her mention of "needle-women" and "tradefallen wives" includes the citizens' wives who "man" their shops on the London street and are the main prey for the gallants in the play. There is something almost desperately aggressive in Moll's loud assertions here that these "fish" must bite first to avoid being eaten by those who can afford to dangle a "golden hook." Because she sees the inevitable teeth behind the material promises society holds out to women, Moll herself has no trouble resisting the gold and silver hooks that Sir Alexander and Trapdoor hang for her in Act IV. In fact, Moll's recognition of the economic deprivation of women, their total financial subjugation under the laws of patriarchy is what makes her such a dangerous character in her world. Furthermore, Moll's inspired tirade against Laxton apparently involves more than just the issue of simple prostitution, although clearly, since he has "hired" her for this meeting with gold coins, the context includes the buying and selling of women for illicit sex.

A larger context for her words is implied by the play as a whole, in which the size of a woman's dowry is the force that drives the main plot, and the shopkeeper's wife luring male customers in by calling to them from the street is a major image of the sub-plot. While the citizens' wives strive to attract the attention of male gallants passing by their shops, continually hoping to sell them a sexual product as well as retail merchandise, Moll refuses commodification, very simply, by making herself "worthless" as a

feminine object – she makes herself look like a man. Moll's clothes seem, at least in part, a defense against sexual attention, her way of diverting masculine advances away from herself. But because cross-dressing actually gets figured as a stimulus to sexuality in the play, Moll's refusal to participate in the marketplace of sexual exchange must be more precisely located in her canting tongue, in the flexibility of her speech. Her willingness and ability to speak without constraint, to join in many different types of discourse (from speaking with nobles to canting with cutpurses), make Moll not only the most delightful character in the play, but obviously the most subversive and treacherous figure confronting the men in her world, who are very conscious of the class and gender boundaries which Moll continually violates.

On still another level, the play itself is a consumable product which offers an audience a roaring girl for its pleasure; the Prologue makes this explicit when it declares: "I see Attention sets wide ope her gates / Of hearing, and with covetous listening waits, / To know what girl this roaring girl should be" (13–15). Even the bawdy double-entendres in this language reveal the Prologue as a kind of "come-on," like Laxton's, that invites lustful desires and mixes them with economic motives. Just as Moll Cutpurse must be "roaring girl" enough to attract an audience to her play, Mary Fitzallard in the main plot, whose dowry is at first too small, must become valuable enough to deserve Sebastian for her husband, and the Citizens' wives in the subplot must be alluring enough to attract male customers into their shops to buy things. In these economic configurations of gender relations, arousing a male consumer's desire for a (presumably female) product seems both figuratively and literally the goal of the text. And with these parallel situations, the play reveals a broader definition of "prostitution" at work in the world it creates, a definition that reveals the exchange of women as commodities operating at all levels of social "intercourse," including the level at which we as an audience come to the play with certain expectations and desires.

Of course, an odd twist is added when we think of Moll being represented on the stage by a boy actor dressed as a woman who dresses like a man, yet is still very obviously a woman (nobody in the play fails to recognize Moll's gender). While nobody would disagree that the play does grant Moll a certain amount of subjectivity, it seems important to ask, as Stephen Greenblatt does of Viola in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, whether that subjectivity has to be "passed through" the masculine in order to come into being.⁵ In a recent essay about boys taking the role of women on the English stage, Stephen Orgel goes beyond the traditional reason for the exclusion

of women actors, which is that acting would encourage promiscuity, and suggests: "Behind the outrage of public modesty is a real fear of women's sexuality, and more specifically its power to evoke men's sexuality."⁶ Orgel sees in the anxiety over men's sexuality the belief that arousal makes a man effeminate, that in excitement a man loses his rational control becoming, in effect, no better than a woman, a slave to passion and a creature dependent on another for completion. If Orgel is even partially right, then the spectacle of the transvestite heroine played by a boy may just be disruptive enough, as a dramatic experience, to allow us to claim for Moll a powerful disruption of the social order that transcends or at least justifies her concession to masculine clothes. What Moll does, after all, by dressing like a man, is attract the male gaze; Laxton tells her, just after she has collared and beaten an unfortunate man in the Openworks' shop, "Gallantly performed, i'faith, Moll, and manfully! I love thee forever for't" (II.i.261-62). By being "manful," Moll makes men dependent on her, and thus makes herself independent of them, in a sense transcending the live boy who plays her as well as the masculine demeanor she adopts.

In an essay in *The Poetics of Gender*, Ann Rosalind Jones tells us that the ideal Renaissance wife or daughter "vanishes under the name and authority of her father and her husband; as daughter and wife, she is enclosed in the private household. She is silent and invisible: she does not speak and she is not spoken about."⁷ As Moll humiliates Laxton and "def[ies] all men," she seems to be also denouncing this social injunction that women stay silent and indoors, locked inside a private realm, venturing forth only at great risk into the public eye, and only to offer themselves as a sexual commodity on the market of exchange between male consumers. Jones' description of the ideal woman underscores the assumption, part of the contemporary public/private dichotomy, that even a woman whose name or character became well-known could be considered sullied just as if she herself were to engage in public discourse. But Moll, unwilling to become an object of exchange, makes herself both a subject in and of the public discourse that names her. If this is Moll's way of defying the patriarchy, then it makes sense that her fame is the very thing which Sebastian's father, Sir Alexander Wengrave, finds most odious in his son's supposed choice of Moll for a mate. Even more than her masculine deportment, Wengrave despises the fact that such a daughter-in-law as Moll would allow herself to be "handled" by other people's staring eyes and gossiping mouths. In his first reaction to Sebastian's feigned love for Moll, Sir Wengrave laments:

... It is a thing
 One knows not how to name: her birth began
 Ere she was all made. 'Tis woman more than man,
 Man more than woman, and - which to none can hap -
 The sun gives her two shadows to one shape;
 Nay, more, let this strange thing walk, stand, or sit,
 No blazing star draws more eyes after it. (I.ii.130-36, emphasis added)

So although he complains both about Moll's lack of a proper name, and her dubious gender, those accusations take a back seat to her scandalous visibility, her willingness to be seen and heard in public - like an actor on a stage. And later on, when Sir Wengrave confronts Sebastian, he tries to show him the folly of his choice by describing what to him would be the most frightening consequence of marrying a woman like Moll:

Why, wouldst thou fain marry to be pointed at?
 Alas the number's great, do not o'erburden't.
 Why, as good marry a beacon on a hill,
 Which all the country fix their eyes upon,
 As her thy folly dotes on. (II.ii.136-40)

In these lines, Sebastian's father makes explicit his society's obsessive link between a talked-about woman and a promiscuous one, assuming that a cuckolding wife is the same as a well-known one, and that both will necessarily be "pointed at." By letting herself be known, Moll has decreased her value as an exchange object; by becoming a subject who speaks for herself in the masculine realm, she has made herself ineligible as a marriage partner.

In her essay "Women on the Market," Luce Irigaray speaks of two specific standards against which the worth of a woman can be measured in a patriarchal system of exchange - gold and the phallus.⁸ This idea helps to expose the dynamic of exchange in this world where the feminine is commodified and valued as an object according to a kind of "market price." In Laxton's eyes, as we've seen, Moll's masculine demeanor actually seems to increase her sexual value. And later in the play, when Mary Fitzallard is disguised as a male page, Sebastian exclaims in kissing her, "Methinks a woman's lip tastes well in a doublet" (IV.i.47). At both of these moments the play borders on becoming something like a parody of itself. A masculine woman should be "worthless" in a patriarchal marketplace because she refuses to conform to the model woman - chaste, silent, and obedient. But somehow, these two Molls, by cross-dressing, actually attract the male gaze

and enhance their value, and so as the scandal of being a roaring girl gets diminished, the play seems to be laughing at its own capacity to attract attention. Are we, along with Laxton, becoming the butt of the play's most complex joke? The name Laxton puns on "Lackstone" after all, and he is poor in both of the measures Irigaray posits for a woman's worth, gold and the phallus, so it is fitting that he would so violently desire to usurp Moll's "treasure" and make it his own. As audience, we may see ourselves implicated in the same kind of transaction: does scoffing at Moll's cross-dressing help us to feel more secure in our own gendered identities, or does it rather expose our own repressed desires for the freedoms of androgyny? In any case, as we enjoy Moll's banter, her "outrageous" costume and mannerisms, we are being asked to remember the theatrical situation and the possibility that by attending the performance, or by purchasing a copy of the text we participate in the system of exchange that informs this play's politics.

Even as we may claim that Moll escapes dependency and commodification at the level of representation, we need to ask if she then becomes a commodity for us to consume. What kind of pleasure, after all, do we pay for at a production of *The Roaring Girl*? In their Prologue, the authors humbly disclaim any attempt at "tragic passion, / And such grave stuff," as "out of fashion" (11-12). On the other hand, the Prologue, by defining Moll in negative terms ("None of these roaring girls is ours" [25]) leads us to expect, paradoxically, a Moll beyond our expectations - and in this we are not disappointed. Moll is unique in the world of this play in many respects, but more crucial even than her transvestite status, and in spite of the fact that she helps Sebastian and Mary with their marriage plans, she stands out as the one character who disrupts society's "prostitution," or exchange of women. In doing so she asks us to question our own use of her for our entertainment, to question, perhaps, our own ability to enjoy her antics as "freakish," and thus not to be too much affected by them.⁹

In addition to her entertaining costume and her witty, often bawdy dialogue, is the unsettling fact that Moll does not have in this play any given surname. She possesses neither the stamp of the father, as Mary Fitzallard does, nor the mark of a husband as do the Mistresses Gallipot, Openwork, and Tiltyard. Instead, she comes to us unmediated, without a social filter, one moment full of military valor (as when she confronts Laxton with her sword [III.i.38-112]), the next moment displaying an almost maternal sympathy (as when she wants to help the men disguised as homeless soldiers [V.i.79-81]). And even though the suggestiveness of the shopwives' names is fairly obvious, it is only Moll who, lacking a proper

name, is called after her supposed professions: "Moll" – a common name for whores – and "Cutpurse" – the name of a thief – assign Moll both an occupation and lower-class status. Here again we realize that to have a name that describes her, however erroneously, Moll must be well-known and very much talked about.

Even on a formal level, though, Moll's rather late entrance into a play that bears her name is a clue that we should expect her to rise above and even expose the limits of the terms in which other characters describe and point at her. When we first hear of Moll, in the play's opening scene, Sebastian is painting a picture of her to another woman whom he also calls "Moll," his real love, Mary. While relating to Mary his plot to feign love for Moll so that his father will eventually accept Mary as a preferable daughter-in-law, Sebastian describes Moll as "a creature / So strange in quality, a whole city takes / Note of her name and person" (I.i.100–02), thus putting his Mary's mind at ease – Sebastian could never be fool enough to love a woman the whole city notices. However, this catalogue of Moll's strangeness does not have the same calming effect on an audience aware of its dramatic context. As he speaks, Sebastian's beloved Mary stands before him disguised as a sempster, a person of lower class than himself, and he calls her too, a "strange shape," and complains to Mary that her "so strange disguise / Holds me with fear and wonder" (I.i.5–6). Not only are Moll and Mary being deliberately and deeply confused in this scene, but Sebastian, whose words create the confusion, seems completely unaware of the possibility that the two women inhabit the same moral universe. In his blindness to the overlap in Moll and Mary's characters, but also in his rather callous response to Mary's disguise, Sebastian makes us aware of his world's inability to get past superficial appearances; he teaches us to mistrust what we hear of Moll Cutpurse, to be suspicious of the conventional equation between women's voice or fame and women's chastity, an equation which seems to structure the perceptions of Moll throughout.

Furthermore, as Mulholland suggests, the withholding of Moll's entrance, while we continue to hear her described, kindles our expectations, makes us anxious, as the Prologue says, "to know what this roaring girl should be"¹⁰ (15). In some sense, then, we are positioned, as audience, in the role of male consumer, and with our "gates of attention set wide open," it may be that we too are being cast as effeminate men, as if the play is enacting its own masculine anxieties, unable to believe that the Roaring Girl can be completely contained as a harmless, conventional instrument who will, in the end, contribute to the patriarchal system of marriage and exchange. This seems especially plausible because, far from arousing our

disgust, by the time Moll enters, the talk of her has made her seem already somehow familiar to us and thus not so "strange and fearful" as Sebastian would have it. Just as the Prologue advises the audience to abandon our preconceived notions of what a roaring girl will be – "None of these roaring girls is ours: she flies / With wings more lofty" (25–6) – it seems that we will have to learn to reject the limited perspectives from within the play as somehow inadequate, and be prepared to respond to the Roaring Girl without the usual kinds of mediations and filters we may be comfortable with. Read this way, after the first one and one half acts where we meet a host of characters obsessed with financial concerns (Wengrave, Trapdoor, the gallants, even Sebastian, who will not marry without his inheritance), it is natural for us to be relieved when Moll enters with a kind of freshness about her, speaking a language not drenched in economic terms, and going about her business unconcerned with the financial gains and losses that rule the other characters' lives.

When we first see Moll, then, she is strolling casually through the streets, not yet in men's clothes, nor exactly in conventional women's dress, but comfortably androgynous in a man's "frieze jerkin" and a woman's "safeguard." As she walks onto the stage, Moll immediately claims all of the gallants' attention as well as our own, and it is as if some new life is being breathed into the play at this point: "Life, yonder's Moll!" / "Moll! which Moll?" / "Honest Moll." / "Prithee, let's call her. – Moll!" / "Moll, Moll, pist, Moll" (II.i.175–179). Stopping at the Gallipots' apothecary just long enough for a brief chat and a puff of tobacco, Moll engages the gallants in friendly conversation, neither coy nor belligerent, but speaking rather off-handedly as among equals: "How now? What's the matter?" "I cannot stay." "Well, what is't?" "Yes, faith, 'tis very good tobacco." (II.i.180–199). Chatting in this way, and calling out an unanswered greeting to Mistress Gallipot, Moll moves on. As she walks away unaware of him, Moll becomes the object of Laxton's lustful gaze as he, in looking after her departing figure confesses, "Heart, I would give but too much money to be nibbling with that wench" (II.i.193–194). Because she slips as he says, "from one company to another," Laxton assumes that Moll must be a loose woman, for sale, and he makes his ill-fated pledge to buy her in rather frightening images: "I'll lay hard siege to her; money is that *aqua fortis* that eats into many a maidenhead; where the walls are flesh and blood, I'll ever pierce through with a golden auger" (II.i.202–205).

When Moll's stroll finally takes her to her destination, the sempster's shop, Mistress Openwork turns her away, yelling, "Get you from my shop!" because Mister Openwork's fond familiar greeting has made her jealous of

Moll. In some sense, Mistress Openwork's treatment of Moll is more painful even, for Moll and for an audience, than Laxton's remarkably crude and condescending decision to "buy" her. As angry as she is at the Shopkeeper's rebuff, however, Moll manages to hold back her wrath just until, in an original stage direction, a fellow enters, "with a long rapier by his side" (II.i.243).¹¹ As if acknowledging that long rapier's offensive symbolic potency, Moll immediately turns from the woman saying, "Ha! be thankful; / Now I forgive thee" (243-44), and begins to assault the unsuspecting fellow with all the venomous energy she had been keeping in check, crying "You Goodman Swine's face!" (246), and beating him severely before her rage is spent. Almost as if she realizes that Mistress Openwork's scorn is not her own, but the result of the competition which a patriarchal society perpetuates between women on the market, Moll refuses to vent her anger on the woman, and turns instead to the first man she sees.

In another essay, "Commodities Among Themselves," Irigaray speculates that commodities of exchange must compete with each other for value which, in any capitalist society, will always be a relative thing and will always be determined by those with buying power – in this case, men.¹² Thus a woman's worth in the world of this play is calculated in comparison to another woman's value, and value itself must be measured against an external standard – the third term in the exchange. In this case, the third term could be the length of a man's "rapier" – who deserves the greatest share of it, or the amount of gold he will spend in a woman's shop – who can command the highest price. Interestingly, in the entire play, only Moll is offered money for her services; the other women, Mary and Mistress Gallipot in particular, end up actually paying out money for male attention. But as in the scene where she flings Laxton's coins back at him, Moll at this moment, after being insulted by Mistress Openwork, does not join in the individual competition that the insult might provoke, but rather lashes out against a social structure and an economic system which put her in competition with other women and make all women prey for men.

If we can assume that there is probably more at stake in this very funny scene than just Moll's dislike of long rapiers, perhaps what the play is saying is something quite serious about Moll's disruption of the "intercourse" into which she has unknowingly stepped as she entered the play. The scene that Moll interrupts is a city street with three shops open in a rank, and three shopwives vying for the business of the three gallants passing along the street. As the men pass, Mistress Openwork steps out and calls to them: "Gentlemen, what is't you lack? What is't you buy?" (II.i.1-2). The bawdy double-entendre latent in this image would not have been wasted on

Middleton and Dekker's audience, any more than it is wasted on the gallants themselves, who gossip, as they walk along, about the quality of the shopwomen's "goods" and at what price they might be had. To describe Moll's entrance as a breath of fresh air is more than a metaphor at this point, for it seems fairly obvious, by her androgynous dress, and her straight, uncompromising dialogue, that Moll has taken herself off of the kind of market that gets figured in the exchange between the shopwomen and the gallants. An audience must feel relieved, then, as well as amused, to see that Moll neither solicits the male gaze, nor as Laxton soon discovers, can she be bought with gold coins. Even the gallant's chivalry seems unacceptable to Moll – perhaps because it would cost too much of her own self-respect to purchase it. Thus, when Laxton offers to protect Moll from the fellow with the long rapier (after she has already trounced him, of course), she responds innocently: "You prepared for him? why should you be prepared for him, was he any more than a man?" (II.i.265–66).

Farther along on her walk, after she has been accosted by Laxton and has arranged the ill-fated rendezvous at Grey's Inn Fields where our discussion started, Moll is again stopped by a man who would court her – this time it is Sebastian. Coming as it does so soon after Laxton's crude courting, Sebastian's fairly naive, polite advances to Moll may seem a vivid contrast, but Moll exposes them as actually quite similar when she responds, "Sir, I am so poor to requite you, you must look for nothing but thanks of me. . . . I love you so well, sir, for your good will I'd be loath you should repent your bargain after" (II.ii.35–41). The level of Sebastian's appeal that Moll is responding to is of course the economic one; she cautions him against the bargain he proposes – her femininity for his hand (and fortune) in marriage. The sincerity in Moll's reply that he would not get a fair bargain, for she cannot make herself a feminine commodity, is especially touching in light of the fact that Sebastian's proposal is a sham. Although Moll does not know it at this point, ironically, the deal Sebastian has in mind is much more financial and less romantic than that of marriage: he wants Moll to pretend to love him so that Mary and her small dower will look more attractive to his father in comparison – and of course Sebastian is willing to pay Moll for her efforts. The last part of Moll's answer to Sebastian sets up a significant structural and substantive echo with her response to Laxton's lewd request: "I have the head now of myself," she says, "and am man enough for a woman; marriage is but a chopping and changing, where a maiden loses one head and has a worse i'th'place" (II.ii.42–4). In her tirade against Laxton in Act III, Moll concludes with another set of lines that work with balance and parallel structure to express

a kind of disgust with the kind of woman she would have to be in order to please a man: "Tell them 'twere base to yield, where I have conquered. / I scorn to prostitute myself to a man, / I that can prostitute a man to me" (III.i.108-10).

In a recent article concerned with cross-dressing, social stability, and *The Roaring Girl*, Mary Beth Rose suggests that the exclusion of Moll from the traditional, comic celebration at the end of the play, may be a result of the playwrights' never entirely separating Moll from the "outlaw status" of her real-life counterpart, Mary Frith.¹³ More simply, it seems to me that Moll's repeated insistence on her unwillingness to become a man's woman, her defensive claim that she can be both woman and man herself, is a compelling enough reason for her to be excluded from the comic revival of the society at the play's end. In placing herself so definitely and defiantly into an androgynous role, Moll celebrates her independence from men and from women, as those roles are defined in her world. Her unwillingness to enter the market of exchange must effectively exclude her from the celebration of exchange that constitutes marriage as her society knows it. By being thus excluded, the figure of the Roaring Girl reveals both the triumphs and the limitations of her stance, and in one of her last, most poignant lines, Moll seems both to acknowledge and choose exclusion when, having been forgiven by Sebastian's father, and no longer condemned for trying to seduce his son, she remarks: "He was in fear his son would marry me, / But never dreamt that I would ne'er agree" (V.ii.213-14).

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Notes

- 1 T.S. Eliot, "Thomas Middleton," *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 June, 1927: 445-6; the essay is reprinted (among other places) in his *Elizabethan Essays* (1934; repr. Faber & Faber, 1963), pp. 83-93 (quotation at pp. 90, 93).
- 2 Paul Mulholland, introduction, *The Roaring Girl*, by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 20-21. Mulholland refers specifically to Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), and Patrick Cheney, "Moll Cutpurse as Hermaphrodite in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*," *Renaissance and Reformation* ns 7 (1983): 120-134.
- 3 All citations are from Mulholland's edition (fn. 2 above) with subsequent references given parenthetically within the text.
- 4 Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540-1620* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 255.
- 5 Stephen Greenblatt, "Fiction and Friction," *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 92.
- 6 Stephen Orgel, "Nobody's Perfect: Or Why Did the English Stage Take Boys for Women?," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 85 (Winter, 1989), p.26.

- 7 Ann Rosalind Jones, "Surprising Fame: Renaissance Gender Ideologies and Women's Lyric," *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 74.
- 8 Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market," *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 174.
- 9 In her fascinating discussion of the cross-dressing dynamics in *The Roaring Girl*, "Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in *The Roaring Girl*," *Renaissance Historicism*, eds. Arthur F. Kinney and Dan S. Collins (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), Mary Beth Rose confronts this same problem when she says in her conclusion: "In the play [Moll] remains pleasantly isolated from society, a loveable outlaw whose eccentricity insures that she will not constitute a social threat" (p. 246). That simple negation of Moll's power to incite change seems to me one of the crucial problems in our experience of the play, and I wonder if it does not have something to do with our biases about its male authorship; do we take *The Roaring Girl* less seriously because we know it was written by two men in a patriarchal culture? And perhaps more importantly, should we?
- 10 Mulholland, *The Roaring Girl*, p. 15.
- 11 Mulholland, *The Roaring Girl*, p. 111, glosses this stage direction by referring to a Tudor proclamation against the wearing of long swords and rapiers, and to a quip in Wycherley's *Country Wife*, I.i.285-86 (Revels ed.), "Most men are the contraries to that they would seem: your bully, you see, is a coward with a long sword." In any case, it seems that long rapiers were making enough of a stir in Tudor England so that the prop Middleton and Dekker give to this fellow would not be seen as purely incidental.
- 12 Irigaray, "Commodities Among Themselves," *This Sex Which Is Not One*, pp. 192-96.
- 13 Mary Beth Rose, "Women in Men's Clothing," p. 246.