

A Woman Killed with Kindness: Author's Response*

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My essay on *A Woman Killed with Kindness* has elicited a number of thoughtful and interesting responses, from Nancy Gutierrez, from Diana Henderson and Michael Wentworth, and most recently from Sue Wiseman; in turn, Inge Leimberg has kindly asked me to round off the discussion by a reply to the replies. I am very pleased to have been the occasion of so much informed comment on what seems to me to be a very sadly neglected genre; I am also very grateful for the opportunity to respond, since it seems to me a rare privilege actually to attempt to clarify one's own work in the light of others' reception of it.

Diana Henderson attributes to me the desire to "rescue" *A Woman Killed with Kindness* from the genre category of domestic tragedy (49), and cites my classification of the genre as "the rude, episodic, unshaped story of ordinary people, the stuff of journalistic ephemera, which was, moreover, very often centred on the domestic world and amorous passions so closely associated with women." She then wonders about my "rhetorical relationship" to this sentence. From the point of view of "author's intention," that is quite simple: it is ironic—a mode which perhaps does not always travel well. Henderson herself later notes that "This would seem to be an apt description of common sixteenth-century

*Reference: Lisa Hopkins, "The False Domesticity of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Connotations* 4.1-2 (1994/95): 1-7; Nancy A. Gutierrez, "A Response to Lisa Hopkins," *Connotations* 4.3 (1994/95) 242-45; Diana E. Henderson, "A *Woman Killed with Kindness* and Domesticity, False or True: A Response to Lisa Hopkins," *Connotations* 5.1 (1995/96): 49-54; Michael Wentworth, "Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and the Genetics of Genre Formation: A Response to Lisa Hopkins," *Connotations* 5.1 (1995/96): 55-68; S. J. Wiseman, "More on Reading 'Domestic' Tragedy and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*: Another Response to Lisa Hopkins," *Connotations* 6.1 (1996/97): 86-91.

associations, not the author's own" (52). Indeed I do not, as Henderson suggests, find the genre of domestic tragedy "seamy" (52); I just question how firmly *A Woman Killed with Kindness* fits into it.

What, in fact, I was interested in, was not my personal views on genres but Heywood's own project, particularly its intersection with the burgeoning category of domestic tragedy and whether the playwright might have been influenced by anything resembling a hierarchy of genres or an aesthetic of narrative shape. I had no intention of denigrating domestic tragedy *per se*—I am keenly alive to its manifold and powerful fascinations—but I do suspect Heywood of some awareness, however embryonic, of an emerging distinction between popular culture and art, and of wishing to align himself with the latter category while not sacrificing the vigour of the former. Whether such a cultural shift was actually present (and could be detected) is undoubtedly debatable, and I would like to see the debate: Michael Wentworth's article is particularly interesting in this respect, as is Sue Wiseman's lively and powerful discussion.

It has often been asserted that Shakespeare did not believe his plays would last, and yet they are highly self-conscious about their nature as art. In the case of domestic tragedy, much of it did *not* last—and this is what I was referring to when I talked of the ephemeral nature of the genre. Since the plays are lost, of course, discussion of their nature must perforce be highly speculative, except in so far as it can be guided by Adams' listings and by Charles Sisson's pioneering work in *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age*, and I was, therefore, perhaps rash to refer so categorically to "the journalistic, ad hoc air which has led to so many examples of the genre failing to survive" (though I note that Michael Wentworth makes a similar assumption about lost domestic tragedies [63]). Nevertheless, I still stand by what I tried to suggest in my original essay: I have personally no desire to "rescue" *A Woman Killed with Kindness* from the category of domestic tragedy, but I do wonder whether Heywood didn't.

That, of course, would take us into the realm of author's intentions, which is notoriously shaky ground. Nancy Gutierrez raises a rather similar point when she suggests that it is Puritan rather than Catholic ideology that Heywood seems to be exploring (243), and Michael

Wentworth also touches on this point. He wonders whether I “[mean] to suggest that Heywood’s sympathies and intentions are pro-Catholic,” since “such a stance would clearly contradict . . . his life-long interest in and glorification of the Protestant middle class. Alternatively, to read Heywood’s treatment of Frankford’s kindness, Anne’s self-starvation, and related matters as a parody of Catholic beliefs just as clearly devalues the obvious homiletic structure of the play and Heywood’s clearly sympathetic treatment of Frankford and Anne” (58). I certainly do not suggest that Heywood was personally pro-Catholic—that would be simply silly—but I do feel that, in the play, he shows considerable interest in the ways in which personal behaviour and psychology are inflected by shared social and spiritual beliefs. As I pointed out originally, Katie Mitchell’s RSC production imaged these communal values as specifically Catholic, a decision which seems to me to make considerable sense, given the strong association between the Old Religion and the north of England. Nor need a representation of Catholic practice be automatically parody. Heywood’s personal Protestantism is unlikely to have led him to a simple demonisation of Catholicism: there is plenty of evidence that individual Renaissance Protestants got on perfectly well with their individual Catholic neighbours. For a northern gentlewoman to be particularly aware of fasting practices might have been simply as much a factual matter as the presence of a castle in York or the tendency of the squirearchy to wager.

Whatever the specific doctrinal inflection of Anne’s beliefs, what seems to me particularly remarkable about Heywood’s play is the nature of his representation of her as traversed by cultural assumptions which seem, in many ways, so much stronger than her individual desires: in seminars, I have found that student response invariably focuses on the absence of clearly designated motivation for her adultery, and on the tension between the resulting apparent passivity of her character and the resolution of her actions. As Sue Wiseman so judiciously reminds us, the “domestic,” in the early seventeenth century, was not a hived-off space; and in Anne Frankford we may well see a particularly striking example of the ways in which the public intersects with what we would now consider the private.