Thomas Heywood and the Man Who Loved Women

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Thomas Heywood’s plays are preoccupied with the nature, merit, burdens, and actions of women. Their female characters and their tribulations demonstrate a capacity for empathy and an ability to recruit and cultivate a potentially profitable theater audience. Such drama anticipates the Hollywood studio “women’s pictures” of the 1930s and 1940s.1 Arguably, the Barbara Stanwyck, Joan Crawford, and Bette Davis roles descend from the likes of Anne Frankford and Susan Mountfort in A Woman Killed with Kindness. Heywood’s other dramatic productions feature similarly complex heroines, such as Jane Shore in Edward IV; Queen Elizabeth in If You Know Not Me; Mrs. Arthur in How a Man May Chuse a Good Wife from a Bad; Bess Bridges in The Fair Maid of the West; Phyllis Flower in The Fair Maid of the Exchange; Lauretta and Julia of A Maidenhead Well Lost; and the title role of The Rape of Lucrece. And there are others “reserved amongst two hundred and twenty” in which the playwright claims to have had “an entire hand, or at the least a maine finger.”2 His feminocentrism inspired him to write treatises and to compile encyclopedias devoted to women: A Curtaine Lecture (1638), Exemplary Lives of Nine the Most Worthy Women of the World (1640), and Gunaikeion (1609). Each text praises those who embodied and transcended traditional modes of womanly virtue.

Recent commentators have tended to see Heywood as a proto-feminist rather than a moralist-misogynist sermonizing in poorly-conceived playhouse speeches about Grandmother Eve. Some maintain, for example, that Anne in *Woman Killed* was meant to represent the chief agent in an allegory in which male hegemony destroys the agency of womankind, not the Weaker Vessel simultaneously promulgating and symbolizing female frailty and lust. To this end, Heywood constantly dramatizes a retrograde and self-negating phenomenon that women are compelled to replicate, to his apparent dismay. As Anne, Jane Shore, and even Lucrece (anachronistically) strive to fulfill the tenets of middle-class marital ethics, the very attempt to obey the patriarchy that so oppresses them makes it impossible for them to succeed as wives. Yet the most extreme case of this dynamic in the plays, the vileness of Mr. Arthur toward his spouse in in *How a Man May Chuse*, does not invalidate the idea of the institution itself, even though he is clearly a misogynist idiot who hates his devoted wife who believes companionate Protestant marriage. Her repeated affirmations of her role are more important to her and to Heywood than her spouse and his profound idiocy, which her

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patience and constancy eventually reform. “Wife” is a title that she intends to keep. For reasons such as this, Marilyn L. Johnson, the first critic who devoted an entire study to Heywood and women (1974), asserted that his writing revealed him to be “a man both sensitive and modest, kind and tolerant, genial and good-humored; a man of intelligence and moral refinement.”

How curious, then, that proto-feminist, non-moralizing Heywood deemed Ovid’s distinctly unfeminist Ars Amatoria and its adjunct Remedia Amoris appropriate for translation, the former the first complete rendition of the poem into English, titled Loues Schoole in most editions throughout the seventeenth century. The ancient writer claimed repeatedly in his Tristia that his narrator in the Ars, the glibly misinformed and occasionally misogynist praeceptor Amoris, was hardly his alter ego but a comic persona, perhaps intended as a satire on the decadence of the patrician class. Yet male medieval and early modern readers from Andreas Cappelanus and Jean de Meun onward identified Ovid with his erotic poetry and considered him a learned doctor, his Ars and Remedia authoritative on love as an affliction or disease—which it obviously is, as everyone knows. Early modern reception took note of his theatricality in the plays he was supposed to have written; in the speeches and monologues he composed in the Heroides and Metamorphoses that strongly resemble soliloquies and other types of playhouse speech; and in the prosaic form of comic advice in the Ars that urges the prospective lover to troll for “prettie wenches” who are “thick in full great nomber” at the theater (LS 1.34, 71). Heywood the playwright seems to have been aware of these three traditions and to have informed his translation accordingly. He tacitly reconfigures many such Ovidian canards and at the same time portraits his Ars-informed seducers

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as studies in romantic ineptitude. These two transformational authorial activities, his amelioration of the *praecceptor* in his translation and critique of the unredeemable libertine type in his plays, inform one another in his work. In this way, Heywood’s reading comprises a truly subtle and unique reception of Ovid. Some of his dramatic tableaux resemble his “revisionist” passages in his *Ars*. Heywood destroys the conception of the erotic Ovidian personae that some despised and remakes him onstage as the better man he believed this figure was meant to be.

However, women and clergymen tended not to adopt such a benevolent perspective about Ovid’s poem or attempts to reconfigure it, and many condemned it as antifeminist and ungodly. In the twelfth-century *Guigemar*, Marie de France describes a tapestry showing Venus herself casting “Le livre Ovide” [Ovid’s book] into the fire, a volume that recommends “s’amur estreine” [restraining love], the *Ars* itself. Three centuries later, in Christine de Pizan’s exchange with Pierre Col about *La roman de la Rose*, the “Querelle de la *Rose*,” she refers to Ovid’s poem harshly as “art de faulse malicieuse industrie de decepvoir famnes” [the art of false and malicious work of deceiving women], “la perverse doctrine, et le venin engoisseux” [perverse doctrine and poisonous venom]. In 1496, Savonarola listed the *Ars* first in his list of books to be condemned and burned in Florence: “Ma si vorria fare una legge che’l fussi escluso Ovidio De arte amandi” [But one should make a law that would ban Ovid’s *Art of Love*]. In 1599, Bishop Bancroft and Archbishop Whitgift decreed the same fate for Christopher Marlowe’s translation of the *Amores*, *Certaine of Ovids Elegies*. Pope Paul IV indexed the *Ars* in 1564, the birth year of Galileo, Marlowe, and Shakespeare. 6 Though Heywood probably knew of this notorious reception history in some form,

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he ceaselessly asserted his authorship of the translations and first complained of their piracy by the bookseller Henry Austin in his preface to *The Brazen Age*:

a Pedant about this Towne, who, when all trades fail'd, turn'd Pedagoge, & once insinuating with me, borrowed from me certaine Translations of *Ouid*, as his three books *De Arte Amandi*, & two *De Remedio Amoris*, which since, his most brazen face hath most impudently challenged as his own, wherefore I must needs proclaime it as far as *Ham*, where he now keeps schoole, *Hos ego vericulos feci tulit alter honores*, they were things which out of my iuniority and want of judgement, I commited to the view of some priuate friends, but with no purpose of publishing, or further communicating them. Therefore I wold entreat that *Austin*, for so his name is, to acknowledge his wrong to me in shewing them, & his own impudence, & ignorance in challenging them.\(^7\)

Apparently, lost revenue did not concern him as much as the pilfering of his *Loues Schoole*, which served as the standard version of *Ars* for English readers, reprinted at least six times before 1700, when it was displaced by John Dryden’s rendition, *Ovid’s Art of Love, in Three Books* (1712).\(^8\)

Why would an author of alleged moral refinement, whose plays argue that his mother must have reared him to respect, revere, and champion women, associate himself with poetry that many believed to be aggressively antifeminist?

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\(^{8}\) *Ovid’s Art of Love, in Three Books, Translated by Mr. Dryden, Mr. Congreve, &c, Together with the Remedy of Love, to Which Are Added, The Court of Love, A Tale from Chaucer, and the History of Love, Adornd with Cuts* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1712).
Perhaps such a question is anachronistic, reflective of twenty-first-century concerns rather than those of early moderns. Heywood and his contemporaries clearly relished and made frequent use of texts heretical, pornographic, and anti-monarchical, such as those by William Tyndale, Pietro Aretino, and Niccolò Machiavelli. As for Ovid, Ben Jonson knew the Ars and subtly deployed it in his poetry and drama. In his corrupting charm, Volpone behaves as a type of Ovidian seducer and puppeteer, best exhibited in the carpe diem lyric “Drink to me only with thine eyes.” In Epicoene, the approving playwright ensured that the rakish True-wit repeatedly paraphrases or quotes from the poem as magister Amoris. Those who fail spectacularly in this type of gallantry rightfully embody their less respectable names, such as Sir Amorous La Foole. In Poetaster, Jonson changed history by depicting Ovid himself at the time of his exile as a romantic youth, rather than the middle-aged man he was, who ardently risks his all for a woman, then suffers banishment for his amour with Augustus’s daughter Julia, actually that emperor’s granddaughter. Heywood likewise featured the Ars-infused male in his plays, such as Mr. Fuller in How a Man May Chuse and the king himself in Edward IV. This figure complements the author’s female archetypes: reluctant adulteress, endangered maiden, unappreciated housewife, scorned adulteress. Ovid, it should be noted, is the most frequently cited author in Gunaikeion, with twenty-seven different verse translations of more than four lines in length, most of which quote from or rewrite

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9 Jonson’s Under-woods (1640) includes three examples of neo-Ovidian elegies in closed pentameter couplets: “That Love’s a bitter sweet,” “Since you must goe,” and the celebrated “Let me be what I am, as Virgil cold.” Joseph A. Dane argues that True-wit’s lines in Epicoene frequently paraphrase the Ars amatoria. The Play is “itself a metamorphosis of Ovid’s texts: it contains all the varied tones and ambiguities found in those texts that we can still refer to as a coherent unit under the single name of their author. . . . Ovid’s poetry itself is a synthesis and compendium of classical traditions and it is difficult to view such an Ovid as alien to Ben Jonson.” These ideas apply nicely to Poetaster. See “The Ovids of Ben Jonson in Poetaster and in Epicoene,” in Drama in the Renaissance: Comparative and Critical Essays, edited by Clifford Davidson, C. J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1986), 113; 103-15.

10 Johnson, Images of Women, 27.
passages from *Loues Schoole.* Men who revere women, according to Heywood, are allowed to love Ovid, including himself.

I alluded to François Truffaut’s *L’homme qui aimait les femmes* (1977) in my title because this epithet evokes aspects of Heywood’s Ovidian theater and shares some of its traditions, however unconsciously. The film does not valorize its incorrigible protagonist, Bertrand Morane or mock him for contracting gonorrhea as dramatists such as William Wycherley or Molière might have, were he to have taken a bow in a later seventeenth-century play. Nor does it demonize him as as a charmless boor who, as we would say now, harasses and degrades women, such as Michael Caine’s *Alfie* (1966). Truffaut’s tone, embodied in the affectionate narration of the intermittent female narrator Geneviève, suggests that Bertrand’s skirt-chasing is compulsory, even pathological, not always an activity he enjoys. So the director, drolly disinterested, presents his roué’s amorous progress in a cinematic narrative simultaneously picaresque and circular, his end encoded in his beginning. In the opening sequence at Bertrand’s funeral, set in Montpellier, the camera’s eye

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focuses on the legs of his myriad former lovers, clad in the ultra-feminine bias-cut sheer Saint-Laurent and Halston dresses complemented with the requisite Charles Jordan high heels and wedges he so loved, as the women approach his open grave, ritually toss dirt on his coffin, and pass by like grieving angels. In the finale, the hero causes his absurd death by inadvertently disconnecting his IV drip while stretching to gape at a nurse’s beautiful legs from his hospital bed, his night’s lodgings because an automobile hit him as he was, of course, straining to look at the similarly shapely legs of two women walking down the street. Bertrand thinks of himself as a man who loves women, beginning with his unashamedly promiscuous mother, though as Truffaut and Geneviève constantly imply, he does not understand what a relationship is. In the middle of the film, one of his many nightly companions, Fabienne, explains this to him in a way that recalls Christine’s condemnation of the Ars: “Homs qui veult selon ce livre faire / N’amera ja” [the man who wants to learn from this book will never understand how to love].

Ovid’s praeceptor Amoris has obviously fooled himself into thinking himself a man who loves women, a delusory sensibility that Heywood evokes in Loues Schoole. His male play characters in this mode foretell the film’s title and its hero who runs in circles, minus his good nature and his feminine champions. They suffer from a similar inability to understand or sustain intimate relationships, to accept women as peers, or to benefit from their companionship,

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perspective, and wisdom. Naturally not one of them can recognize that virtually any man such as himself who boasts that he is knowledgeable about loving the opposite sex ironically reveals the opposite. That is, he is an ignoramus whose very claims of expertise actually betray his contempt for women. In this way, Heywood depicts his masters of love as dispassionately as Ovid allows his speaker to portray himself, or as neutrally as Truffault presents Bertrand.

Heywood might have undertaken his translations before he began constructing drama that features rogue male characters. If so, Loues Schoole would have been a felicitous means of teaching himself to write dramatic speech, just as Christopher Marlowe’s rendering of the Amores into English helped him learn his theatrical craft, that text surreptitiously and posthumously published as Certaine of Ovid’s Elegies and then All Ovids Elegies (1599). These complementary Ovidian personae reconfigured from antiquity represent types of the masculine voice, advising, cajoling, seducing, describing, dissembling, commanding, grieving, joking, and raging, in frequently idiomatic classical Latin. The act of transforming them into men of one’s own time provides the shrewd translator of any era with training in creating speakers with a multiplex spectrum of emotional ranges, which essentially defines the playwright’s job. Heywood, like Marlowe before him, happily subjected himself to this translinguistic and transgeneric schooling.
Ovid’s praeceptor manifests himself repeatedly in Heywood’s dramatic corpus. Unlike Jonson, he chose not to elevate this teacher-lover into a mostly wise Mr. True-wit. Instead, when his pseudo-Ovidian figures surface in the guises of diverse male characters, the plays undermine and lampoon them. Various scenes of seduction that correspond uncannily to passages from *Loues Schoole* tend to end disastrously for the perpetrators. They show that the praeceptor’s advice for convincing women to indulge in a merry romp is trite, oversimplified, and unsuccessful. Other men who love women in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and *How a Man May Chuse* agonize guiltily about their passions and the trouble they might cause for their objects, qualms that no functional Lothario would likely allow to trouble him. By such means, Heywood thought of himself as a man who loved women, dedicated to “the praise of their much honoured sexe,” as he puts it in *A Curtaine Lecture*.15 His continual criticism of the rogue male praeceptor figure constitutes such praise.

In order to dramatize this critique, Heywood mans his plays with those who adopt the program and mores of the praeceptor. Ovid’s persona intimates that love is an assault that compels a virulent counterattack: “the more deepe my flaming heart is found, / The more I will reuenge me of my wound” (LS Pr.31-32). In the works of the seventeenth-century dramatist, such vindictiveness manifests itself in unexpected

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15 *A Curtaine Lecture*, (London: Robert Young, 1637), A3
ways. Tarquin’s son Aruns defends the ravishing of Lucrece to her kinsmen: “was she not a woman, / I, and perhaps was willing to be forc’d[?]” (RL 5:240). The similarly tactless and outspoken Sir Francis Acton from A Woman Killed says aggressively ribald things about his own sister on her wedding day: “In a good time that man both wins and wooes, / That takes his wife downe in her wedding shoe” (WK 2:94). In 1 Edward IV, the similarly ungallant Falconbridge informs a certain goldsmith that his pretty spouse should be his for the asking, thus ironically foretelling the king’s later conquest in a gesture bordering on the mythical droit de seigneur: “Shore, listen: thy wife is mine, that’s flat. / This night, in thine own house, she sleeps with me” (1E4 1:16). In the same play, Edward, whose scruples occasionally trouble him, expresses his inflamed passion for Jane with violence that anticipates Macbeth: “Gaze, greedy eies; and be not satisfied / Till you find rest where hearts desire doth bide” (1E4 1:64). Lucrece’s soon-to-be rapist, Sextus, assaults her with words that resemble the violation he is about to perpetrate in their virulence, jagged meter, and heavy consonance: “Not love-sicke, but love-lunaticke, love-mad: / I am all fire, impatience, and my blood / Boyles in my heart, with loose and sensual thoughts” (RL 5:217). Heywood’s prosody rose above the pedestrian when it suited him.

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\[16\] Most quotations from Heywood’s plays follow The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood, 6 vols. [edited by Richard Herne Shepherd] (London: J. Pearson, 1874), with title abbreviation, volume, and page number in parentheses. The exception is A Pleasant conceited Comedie, Wherein is shewed how a man may chuse a good Wife from a Bad (London: Printed for Mathew Lane, 1602), with references to signature numbers.
Heywood often portrays one of his amorous rogues as a pedagogue of whose lessons he scarce approves, whom he depicts with the contempt that he expressed for Henry Austin the plagiarizing schoolmaster. His idiomatic translation reveals his recognition that Ovid’s praceptor dispenses his advice with absolutely zealous overconfidence, reinforced by the closed couplets and their sometimes discordant rhymes. This intensity compliments the profound inaccuracy of his precepts. For example, since “Stolen pleasure . . . To women is now and at all times euer gratefull,” any attempt on their virtue can only be doubly productive, for the lover and the beloved. A woman’s reluctance should not be confused with unwillingness, for “what she most forwarnes she most desires: / In frosty woods are hid the hottest fires” (LS 1.315-17; 622-23). Or, “‘Tis easie to make vs thinke we are beloued, / Their faith which do desire is quickly moued” (3.815-16). Surely few beloved women would appreciate their lovers following this advice in order to move them: “Warne thy cold hands betwixt her panting breasts” (2.290). Heywood’s ultimate example of the type is Mr. Fuller in How a Man May Chuse. He advises Mr. Anselme about the best way to approach a woman he adores for purposes of seduction. In this case, she happens to be the virtuous Mrs. Arthur, that heroine whom Heywood so esteems for holding to marital chastity in spite of the hateful behavior of her husband. Fuller advises against the conventional romantic approach, what he terms “antick queint formalitie” such as bashfulness, blushing, being “too apish female,” arriving in her presence armed with “foolish Sonets,” “pend speeches, or too far fetcht sighes” (B4v). Should Anselme wish to free himself permanently from feminine companionship,
Mr. Fuller says, “list to me, I le turn thy hart from loue, / And make thee loath all of the feminine sexe” (HMC B3). This preposterous invitation to inculcate blanket misogyny foretells the theme of Ovid’s *Remedia Amoris* and Heywood’s translation of that poem misattributed to Sir Thomas Overbury, *The Remedy of Loue*: “Il’e ease you now which taught to loue before, / The same hand which did wound shall heale the sore” (1.17-18).

Heywood includes a scene featuring Fuller counseling Anselme in a series of asides as he reluctantly approaches the faithful and constant Mrs. Arthur that firmly locates his translation in his play. It is unsurprising that the student eventually refers to the teacher as “my bitter Genius” (HMC Hv). He fulfills the praeceptor’s dictum about fortitude in his advice to his pupil and in his own persistence in providing the lesson. Heywood’s Ovid assures the reader, “Do but persist the suite thou hast begone, / In time will chaste *Penelope* be wonne” and “Flatter, speake faire, ’tis done with little cost” (LS 1. 608-09; 556). Likewise, Fuller demands that Anselm proceed with similarly merciless and mendacious assurance regarding Mrs. Arthur: “Be not afraid man, shee’s but a woman . . . Think but vpon my former principles” (C2). His student infirm of purpose, the
teacher expresses his exasperation to the audience: “Neuer was such a trewant in Loues schoole, / I am asham’d that ere I was his Tutor” (C2v). As scholars have observed, this line invokes the title of Heywood’s translation, albeit one likely provided by Austin and Visscher. Anselme’s profound lack of success with Mrs. Arthur explains the relative efficacy of Fuller’s pseudo-Ovidian tutorial in seduction. Another difficulty is that Anselme truly loves Mrs. Arthur. He is no rogue male and his instincts are gentlemanly: “I cannot chuse but when a wench saies nay, / To take her at her word and leave my sute.” In response, Mr. Fuller’s scorn echoes the praeceptor’s, emphasized in rhyme: “Continue that opinion, and be sure / To die a virgin chaste, a mayden pure” (C2). This cynicism echoes Heywood’s translation of Ovid’s imperative “Fallite fallentes,” “Deceiue the sly deceiver, they find snares / To catch poore harmlesse louers vnawares” (LS 1.846-47). Such facile counsel, flip, glib, and negative, speaks for itself. It is unsurprising that after Anselme makes this discovery he finally explodes at Fuller in a fashion reminiscent of Roderigo to Iago in the fifth act of *Othello* “Now where is your instruction? wheres the wench? / Where are my hopes? where your directions?” (C3).
Heywood frequently heightens this criticism of the praeceptor figure by contrasting him with a complementary character whose experience in following his romantic advice demonstrates that it is often ineffective and sometimes invalid. The gulled prospective lover then voices his displeasure. A man such as Anselme, an inoffensive sort who would leave his suit when a wench said nay, finds out for himself that Fuller’s deeply flawed pseudo-Ovidian program for chasing, seducing, and abandoning women is inimical to him as a person, *contra naturam*. “These are the easie footsteps thou maist tread, / Which haue made way to many a wanton bed” (LS 2.441-42). Trapped by his own bafflement at women and helpless in the face of his feelings for them, his master’s voice confuses rather than clarifies, no more so than in the assurance of “easie.” Most men in Heywood’s plays who actually indulge in the illicit behavior such as the praeceptor recommends seem conflicted, and perhaps tormented. Compulsory rogue maleness is without joy:

*What change is this? proud, fancy, rouing eye,*

*What whisperst in my braine that she is faire?*

*I know it, I see it: fairer than my Queene?* (1E4 1:60)

The speaker is no less than a king of England. In the manner of Mark Antony, Edward makes clear that as he readies himself for infidelity, his eyes are wide open and his will is free: “loue makes no respect, where’er it be” (61). Or as Ovid’s Medea puts it, “Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor” (*Met. 7.20-21*) [I see and know the better way, I follow the worse]. Similarly, Mr. Wendoll in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, who quotes *Loues Schoole*, reveals himself to be a seducer and cuckoldor with a conscience, saying of himself, “I am a Villen if I apprehend / But such a thought . . . Slaue thou art damn’d without redemption.” He idealizes Anne Frankford as if he were a sonneteer: “when I meditate (Oh God forgiue me) / It is on her diuine perfections” (WK 2:108). Anselme uses similar imagery when approaching Mris. Arthur directly if apologetically, “this bold intrusion to your sacred selfe” (HMC C2v). Some on further reflection
find themselves translated, like Bottom. Francis Acton decides that he cannot allow his desperate
deptor Sir Charles Mountford to prostitute his sister Susan to him after all. “I cannot be so crueell
to a Lady / I loue so dearely” (WK 2:146).

Since Heywood constantly championed women and thought of them as transformative
agents for good, those who appear in his plays constitute another riposte to the praeceptor type.
He strives to show them at their best. As he says in A Curtaine Lecture, “Marrie: feare nothing,
Audaces fortuna juvat: for it may be suspected, if there were fewer Bachelours there would be
more honest wives; therefore I say againe, Marry at all adventure.”

In 1 Fair Maid of the West,
Heywood puts this homely
observation into dramatic practice. Bess has accustomed herself to men on the make, be they
kitchen help or sultans. She deflects their advances and converts them to allies who respect her
and channel their admiration of her beauty into a desire to please her and gain her approval. As
she battles the previously unregenerate Mr. Goodlack, she transforms him with “Sir, I will fetch
you wine to wash your mouth, / It is so foule, I feare’t may fester else” (1FMW 2:301). Those less
independent and capable assert themselves nevertheless. Lucrece nearly wins over her assailant
with “To make thy lust live, all thy vertues kill” (RL 5:222). That this type of self-respecting
heroism endures in film and literaturre designed specifically for women suggests that the
playwright might have employed it in order to appeal to his target audience, whom he hoped
would empathize with his heroines by imagining themselves in their roles. [desunt nonulla]

17 A Curtaine Lecture, A3v-A4
18 As Richard Rowland notes, women in 1 Edward IV, A Woman Killed, and The English Traveller are punished or
punish themselves for sexual transgressions that are hardly their fault, and Heywood often modifies his sources to
emphasize how easily their seducers elude responsibility for their fornication in the “ethical and emotional wilderness”
of their “domestic spaces.”