

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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# TUDOR DRAMA

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*Edited by*

THOMAS BETTERIDGE

*and*

GREG WALKER

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Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker

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# ARDEN OF FAVERSHAM: THE MORAL OF HISTORY AND THE THRILL OF PERFORMANCE

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ROS KING

ON 14 February 1551 a murder took place in Faversham, in the county of Kent. Thomas Arden, former mayor of the town, was killed by his wife Alice, her lover Thomas Morsby, or Mosby, and their accomplices: Arden's servants, Michael Saunderson and Elizabeth Stafford; Michael's betrothed and Morsby's kinswoman, Cicely Ponder; various townsfolk, including a goldsmith, Bradshaw, a painter, Clarke, and one Greene from whom Arden had violently wrested some land; as well as a couple of ruffians who went by the evocative names of Black Will and Shakebag. It was a messy affair—the result of a *ménage à trois* gone wrong—and not, one would have thought, of wider importance, yet it spoke to the times, and found its way into national history. It occupies more than four double-column, large-folio pages in Holinshed's *Chronicle*—about 4 per cent of the space devoted to the entire reign of Edward VI.

Less surprisingly, perhaps, it became a very popular play, the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* (first published by Edward White in 1592), which spawned a new genre of true-life domestic tragedy, including *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. The play follows the well-known events of the story very closely, but it combines Cicely Ponder and Arden's household maid Elizabeth into one character, Susan, and makes her the beloved of both Michael and the painter, which has the effect of linking the murderers even more strongly together in both rivalry and obligation.

Holinshed professes that he was doubtful about including the story in his *Chronicle*:

although otherwise it may seeme to bee but a private matter, and therefore as it were impertinent to thys historie, I have thought good to sette it foorth somewhat at large, having the instructions delyvered to me by them, that have used some diligence to gather the true understanding of the circumstances. (Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 1577, p. 1703)

But he was not alone in publishing it. It appears, albeit briefly, in Thomas Lanquet's *An Epitome of Chronicles* (1559), and may well have been the subject of a lost pamphlet, *A Cruel Murder done in Kent*, entered in the Stationers' Register by Edward White in 1577, as well as a now lost play, *Murderous Michael*, performed before Queen Elizabeth in 1579. John Stow includes a reference in his *Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles* (1565), and also described it at much greater length in an unpublished manuscript, *The history of a moste horrible murder commytyd at Fevershame in Kente*.<sup>1</sup>

The story's first appearance, however, seems to have been in John Ponet's *Short Treatise of Politic Power and of the true obedience which subjectes owe to kynges and other civile governours* (1556). This title gives the game away. This was not just any old murder; a family was regarded as the state in miniature, and the killing of a husband by his wife, or a master by his servants, was considered Petty Treason under the Treason Act of 1351.<sup>2</sup> Arden's murderers were dealt with accordingly. Alice was burnt at Canterbury and her personal possessions seized by Faversham council, Michael was hanged in chains, and the maid, Elizabeth Stafford, burnt at Faversham—the gendered punishments for treason. Mosby and Cecily Ponder were merely hanged at Smithfield in London, since they were not part of Arden's household. Of the other accomplices apprehended later, Greene was hanged at Ospringe in Kent, and Black Will burnt at Flushing for his many crimes. Bradshaw was also executed, even though it was acknowledged his involvement had been unwitting.

In Holinshed, this domestic event is made symptomatic of the problems of Edward's short reign. These years saw a succession of threats to authority: rebellions in Norfolk, Yorkshire, and Kent, the loss of Boulogne to the French, war with Scotland, and the impeachment of the Lord Protector, the Duke of Somerset, for treason. Amongst the 'articles objected' against Somerset are that he encouraged the rebels at home, failed to improve the defences of Boulogne, and 'caused diverse persons being arested and imprisoned for treason, murder, manslaughter and felony, to be discharged and set at large against the kings lawes & statutes of this realme' (Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 1577, p. 1701).

Holinshed introduces the entire sequence of events by reprinting *The Hurte of Sedicion* by Sir John Cheke (1514–57), leading humanist scholar, religious reformer and tutor to the young King Edward. This was first published in 1549 in response to Kett's rebellion, which Cheke characterizes as a desire to do away with gentlemen and a backwards-looking resistance to religious reform. For Cheke, sedition has effects similar to war:

and after warres it is commonly seene, that a greate number of those whiche went out honest, returne home againe like roisters, and as though they were burnt to the warres bottome, they have all their life after an unsaverie smacke thereof, and smell still toward dayleepers, pursepickers, highwayrobbers, quarrell makers, yea and bloudsheders too. (Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 1577, p. 1[68]9)

The story of Thomas Arden neatly bears out Cheke's thesis. Shakebag and Black Will are 'highwaie-robbers' and 'bloudsheders', the latter, it was widely reported, having first come to the attention of the authorities for his criminal activities while serving as a soldier at Boulogne. Arden himself had sought to consolidate and improve on his gentlemanly

status by acquiring land and property as a result of the dissolution of the monasteries—part of what Cheke describes as ‘seeing superstition beaten downe, and religion set up’ (Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 1577, p. 1694).<sup>3</sup> Yet he was a parvenu, and he did not display the kind of chivalrous generosity to widows and orphans that was supposed to be exhibited by the gentle class. Arden’s murder was an expression of disorder in the household; it was the result of his misrule, his concupiscence, and dishonest land dealings, and symptomatic of the misrule that Somerset was said to have unleashed on the land.

The most compelling feature of the story, however, and the aspect that most appeals in performance, is that Arden escaped successive attempts on his life, sometimes without knowing the danger he was in, until Mosby, Alice, Michael, Black Will, and Shakebag, all working together for a change, killed him while he was settled in his parlour playing ‘at tables’. Having been repeatedly thwarted by chance, Arden’s murderers were now, at the moment of their success, revealed through the coincidence of a fall of snow, which occurred while they were carrying his body to the field behind the house, but then stopped, preserving the direction of their footprints. The beating down of ‘superstition’, it seems, had opened up other avenues for injustice, which deserved, and provoked, retribution.

This providential aspect of the story takes over as the century progressed, and creeps into the marginal annotations added by clergyman Abraham Flemyng in his revision of Holinshed’s *Chronicle* (1587). These annotations introduce the devil’s agency ‘Marke how the devill will not let his organs or instruments let slip either occasion or opportunitie to commit most heinous wickednesse’ (p. 1062), and highlight the moral lesson.

But, more interestingly, and more usefully for any dramatist, these glosses begin to point to the perpetrators’ differing states of mind. Michael’s doubts are highlighted: ‘Note here the force of feare and a troubled conscience’ (p. 1064). In the play this becomes the powerful speech beginning ‘Conflicting thoughts encamped in my breast / Awake me with the echo of their strokes’ (4.58–87). Similarly, tension between Black Will and Shakebag encapsulated as: ‘One myrthering minde mistrusting another doo hinder the action whereabout they agreed’ (p. 1063) is expanded into the name-calling and brawl of the first half of scene 9.

Flemyng’s notes likewise draw useful attention to Alice’s play-acting: ‘Marke what a countenance of innocencie and ignorance she bore after the murdering of hir husband’, and ‘This she did to colour hir wickedness which by no meanes was excuseable’ (p. 1065). This feature inspires her characterization throughout the play. But the play’s use of the marginal outburst: ‘O importunate and bloudie minded strumpet’ (p. 1064) is more complex. Although the word ‘strumpet’ recurs throughout her row with Mosby in scene 8, it is she who speaks the word first, which somehow deflects Mosby’s use of it. That scene also makes him cruelly manipulative, egging her on by appearing to withdraw from her.

Flemyng knows that Arden too is to blame. The marginal notes describe him as ‘a covetous man and a preferrer of his privat profit bifore common gaine’ (p. 1065). When the widow of one of the men he had deprived of land exclaims against him for his unjust dealings, and curses him to his face, wishing ‘many a vengeance to light upon him’, the

gloss states 'God heareth the teares of the oppressed and taketh vengeance: note an example in Arden' (p. 1066). The land in question was the field behind the house where the murderers left his body, and where the grass was said to bear its imprint for several years.

In the pamphlet literature of the seventeenth century, the murder becomes an archetypal example of a horrid crime discovered by divine providence, but yet with expectation of divine mercy for those who heed its moral lessons. In the words of Thomas Beard:

And thus all the murderers had their deserved dues in this life, and what they endured in the life to come (except they obtained mercy by true repentance) is easie to judge. (*The theatre of Gods judgements wherein is represented the admirable justice of God against all notorious sinners* (1642), p. 208)

Arden's case is also one of Samuel Clarke's 'admirable discoveries of sundry murders' (*A mirrour or looking-glasse both for saints and sinners* (1654), pp. 293–4). And Henry Goodcole, visitor to Newgate prison, and famous for his publications of scaffold confessions by convicted felons, cites Alice Arden's fate as an analogy to his account of the burning of Alice Clarke for poisoning her husband (*The Adulteresses Funeral Day* (1635)). But it is Arden's iniquity, and the fittingness of the place where his body was dumped 'in the very same field which he had unjustly taken from a poore widdow' that interests John Boys:

The judgements of God is at all times terrible, but being executed in the same place, where the malefactor acted the fault, it is more fearefull, it putteth him in mind of his offence, with all the circumstances thereof, and so makes his conscience to denounce his owne condemnation. (*Remaines* (1631), pp. 101–2)

On a slightly different tack, the one-time student actor and later notable protestant cleric and writer, John Reynolds (1549–1607), uses the story to argue for the right to divorce. Expounding on the text 'He that keepeth an adulteresse, is a foole and a wicked man', he asks 'And how can he choose but live still in feare & anguish of minde, least shee add drunckennesse to thirst, & murder to adultery: I meane least she serve him as Clytemnestra did Agamemnon, as Livia did Drusus as Mrs. Arden did her husband?' (*A Defence of the Judgment of the Reformed Churches* (1609), p. 88).

## THOMAS ARDEN IN THE DOCUMENTARY RECORD<sup>4</sup>

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The historical Thomas Arden seems to have been born in about 1508 into the 'middling sort'.<sup>5</sup> His widowed mother is recorded as living in Norwich, where she had to be restrained from begging but was treated with compassion presumably because she was of good family.<sup>6</sup> In 1537 he is described as a clerk to Edward North who helped to set up and

then run the Court of Augmentations, the body that administered the dissolution of the monasteries and the redistribution of their lands. Arden is recompensed on 12 July 1537 for 'writing and making of certain books of Acts of Parliament for the King's Highness concerning as well the suppressed lands as the King's Highness purchased lands'.<sup>7</sup>

North's patronage also sowed the seed of the tragedy, since it included arranging for Arden to marry his stepdaughter, Alice Brigandine, often known as Alice Mirfyn. North's wife had been married twice previously, first to John Brigandine, of Southampton, then to Edward Mirfyn, a member of the Skinners Company and one time Lord Mayor of London. She brought considerable wealth to North, who was himself of fairly humble origins. Mosby, designated as a tailor, had risen to become one of the chief retainers in North's household. The story as a whole is an interesting demonstration of the permeability of class in Tudor England. Patricia Hyde, noting the information in Holinshed that the relationship between Mosby and Alice had continued for a considerable length of time before it became sexual, and also that Arden 'both parmyttyd and also invited hym very often to be in his howse', suggests that Arden's main concern was to maintain his links with North.<sup>8</sup>

By 1539, however, he had acquired a second patron, becoming steward to Sir Thomas Cheyne for the manor of Hothfield (some fourteen miles south of Faversham), where he is found in a court proceeding, having tried to extort land on Cheyne's behalf from one Walter Morleyn. Cheyne was warden of the Cinque Ports, the five ports on the channel coast—Hastings, Romney, Hythe, Dover, and Sandwich—which in return for providing ship service to the crown were granted (among other rights) the right to levy taxes and hold their own courts.<sup>9</sup> It was probably Cheyne who arranged for Arden to become 'customer in chief', or controller of the customs, at Faversham, a small port subsidiary to Sandwich, situated on a navigable creek, the Swale. By September 1543, he was also king's controller of customs for Sandwich itself, and four years later, its MP, although the election was later disputed.

In Arden's day, Faversham was a thriving small town, consisting of more than three hundred houses and tenements. Many remain, including the town warehouse on the quay, just a short walk from Arden's house, now serving duty as a sea-scouts land-base. A customs book survives from Arden's period of office showing almost daily imports of hops, herring, and beer.<sup>10</sup>

All government officials at this period made the bulk of their income in perks, siphoning off some of the fees they collected in the course of their duties, or at the very least, making private use of them until they had to be submitted to the treasury. In 1540, when the sale of former monastery lands began in earnest, Arden was in a good position to begin purchasing property, both for himself and as an agent for others, for which he 'would expect fees both for his services and for obtaining authority from the crown to transfer the land'.<sup>11</sup> He acquired the five acres of land and buildings belonging to the Carmelite friary in Sandwich, a property in Canterbury, a manor at Ellendon, and land in Herne Hill.

The monastery of St Saviours in Faversham, however, was acquired by Cheyne, who quickly proceeded to demolish many of its buildings in order to sell the stone to

reinforce the defences at Calais. It was only once it was denuded that Cheyne sold on the abbey site to Arden. At the same time, towards the end of 1544, Arden acquired some twenty-five dwellings, tenements, messuages (houses with a garden and outbuildings), and orchards in and around Faversham, all formerly belonging to the monastery. Shortly afterwards, he went to court to claim an additional three small properties, which should have been included in that sale, and later he bought the Flood Mill that marked the tidal limit on the East Swale. Far from acquiring 'all the lands of the Abbey of Faversham' as stated in the play (1.5), he was in possession of just over 30 of the 310 houses and other sites that had formerly belonged to it.

The prestigious monastery of St Saviours had been founded in 1147 by King Stephen and Queen Maude to house their tombs. The transept of the abbey still survives, incorporated into the parish church. It retains some magnificent carved misericords in the choir, and an unusual painted pillar. Clearly, before Cheyne's demolition men set to work, it had been a spectacular building. The building that Arden made his home, and which is still known as 'Arden's house', was formerly the Abbey Gatehouse. He may have been responsible for turning it into a very substantial building with a central great hall, because it seems to have been rebuilt in the early to mid-sixteenth century, but now only the two wings survive. The purchase of land constitutes his bid to achieve the status of gentleman, but his other acquisitions in the town were all of modest size. They did not include the more prestigious manors and larger tracts of the monastery's land holdings. But Arden also had a house in London, the parsonage of St Michael's, Cornhill, which he leased from the incumbent priest.

In this late feudal system of land ownership, he held some of his Faversham properties as tenant in chief to the crown, for which he paid 'one tenth of a knight's fee' yearly. Others were held in 'free socage', that is, without any military obligation, and could be sold or inherited without restriction. The complexities of land ownership at this period, however, meant that he found himself in dispute with those who had formerly leased property from the monastery. Many Elizabethans went to law about property disputes, but in Arden's case it contributed to his death.

At the Faversham Wardmote or town council meeting held on 3 November 1544, Arden was deputed to use his influence and skills to obtain letters patent from the King for a new charter so that the town might enjoy the same extensive privileges and rights formerly exercised by the Abbot, including the right to continue to hold two yearly fairs: on Lammas Day (1 August), and St Valentine's Day. Four years later, he became mayor. His year in office is remarkable for the number of attempts to control the behaviour of his fellow citizens. He passed a series of what he terms 'acts', recorded in the town's Ward Mote Book along with his signature. These include compelling those whose property bordered three roads leading to the quay to pay to have them paved—perhaps standing to make a personal profit from the sale of any remaining abbey stone. Another allowed the impounding of wandering pigs. He was not entirely popular in the town. His reforms had been perhaps too extensive, the pursuit of the charter extremely expensive, and the town was in debt. Arden and his friend Dunkyn (the Dumpkin who is mentioned in passing at the end of the play, and in Holinshed) were required to pay a

cess or tax to clear these debts, which they failed to do. There was also, according to Holinshed, disquiet that Arden 'for his owne private lucre and covetous gaine' had moved the Valentine's Day Fair entirely onto his own ground, so 'bereaving the town of that portion which was wont to come to the inhabitants, gote manye a bitter curse' (Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 1577, p. 1707). Previously it had been held partly in the abbey and partly in the town. In 1550, the year before his death, the town council took the fairly unusual step of removing him from his office of jurat—the title given to an alderman in the Cinque Ports.<sup>12</sup>

## FROM HISTORY TO DRAMA

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There are no early records of performances of the play *Arden of Faversham*, but judging by its publication history (three editions between 1592 and 1633), it probably enjoyed considerable popularity on the stage. Not all plays at this period made it to a second performance, let alone into print. But if a play was popular in the theatre, it was reasonably likely to make money as a printed book; the appearance of the book in the booksellers' shops and playbills advertising a performance would reinforce each other commercially. In fact plays that jumped the hurdle into print seem to have had a higher reprint rate than any other types of literature.<sup>13</sup> This is probably because they were a carefully selected group of already popular texts. It therefore seems likely that theatre companies released plays for publication, and were able to find a printer willing to take the risk, at the point when they were being revived in the theatre, perhaps several years after their first appearance.<sup>14</sup>

*Arden of Faversham* was entered in the Stationers' Register on 3 April 1592 by Edward White. The Register also preserves a record of disciplinary proceedings taken later that year against the printer Abel Jeffes for his attempt to produce an edition of the play in contravention of White's right to print it. So he too must have thought that it was a money-spinner. The title page of White's first edition bears no hint of the political use to which Holinshed initially put the story. Arden, it says 'was most wickedlye murdered, by the meanes of his disloyall and wanton wife...Wherin is shewed the great mallice and discimulation of a wicked woman, the unsatiabie desire of filthie lust and the shamefull end of all murderers'. Unsurprisingly, it also advertises the 'two desperate ruffins Blackwill and Shakbag'.

The play was reprinted in 1599, this time by I[ohn] Roberts for Edward White. The 1633 edition, printed by Elizabeth Alde, coincided with three editions of a ballad entitled 'The Complaint of Mistress Arden of Faversham in Kent'. This is a rhyming (and therefore rather jollier) version of the kind of pre-execution confessions written down and published by Henry Goodcole. It is directed to be sung to the tune 'Fortune my Foe', a ballad tune commonly used to accompany the walk to the scaffold. A woodcut appears on the frontispiece of the 1633 edition of the play, shared by all three of the ballad printings showing the moment of the murder as Black Will throws a towel round Arden's neck and pulls him off his stool. Here Alice is depicted wielding a large kitchen knife, but

dressed in a lace-trimmed apron over her fine, trimmed or 'guarded' gown, with broad cuffs to her leg of mutton sleeves, and a large ruff. It is the high fashion of the late sixteenth century, but borne out by the documentary record. Some years after the murder, Alice and Thomas's daughter, Margaret, who had inherited those properties that Thomas held in free socage under the terms of his will, petitioned the town for the return of her mother's personal possessions. An inventory lists clothing and jewellery to the value of more than £45, including various pairs of sleeves, a French hood, a fine 'frocke of black saten garded with velvete' and another of 'tawny damaske'.<sup>15</sup>

## STAGING AND DRAMATURGY

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The play opens at Arden's house with an exchange between Arden and his friend and confidant Franklin, a character invented by the playwright. Franklin appears to be acting as a messenger from the Duke of Somerset, the Lord Protector, and seems to have brought with him the deeds for 'All the lands of the Abbey of Faversham' (1.5); he is referred to as the Protector's man later in the play (9.106). The play thus aligns Arden with Somerset (the opposite of Holinshed's original purpose), and makes him a much greater beneficiary of the dissolution of the monasteries than historically was the case.

Franklin's name cannot be accidental since it befits his nature and his status. He is always frank and open with Arden, and he acts in every way as a franklin or freeman, slightly lower in rank than Arden, who in this play, although not in life, is a 'gentleman of blood' (1.36). William Lambarde, justice of the peace and early historian of Kent, claims the county was a last bastion for 'the estate of the old franklynys and yeomen of England' (William Lambarde, *Perambulation of Kent*, 1576, p. 11).

The play raises Arden up the social scale, making him comment repeatedly, and perhaps rather anxiously, on class distinction. It also makes him rather more jealous of his wife and Mosby than he seems in the source; he can think of nothing but the 'privy meetings' they have been having in the town (1.15). But part of his anger likewise relates to class: he demotes Mosby from tailor to 'botcher' (one who does tailoring repairs):

Who by base brokage getting some small stock,  
Crept into service of a nobleman,  
And by his servile flattery and fawning  
Is now become the steward of his house,  
And bravely jets it in his silken gown.

(1.26–30)

In life, of course, Arden has followed exactly that course, and with the same nobleman, Sir Edward North, but in the play, Mosby's patron is Lord Clifford: 'he that loves not me', says Arden (1.32).

Up to this point, the scene is one of business, and could be construed as taking place in Arden's counting house or office. There is no change of scene, but the subject matter

then becomes more domestic. Arden calls Alice, who enters, mixing reproach with coquettishness:

Summer nights are short, and yet you rise ere day.  
Had I been 'wake, you had not risen so soon.

(1.58–9)

Arden responds:

Sweet love, thou know'st that we two, Ovid-like,  
Have often chid the morning when it 'gan to peep,  
And often wish'd that dark Night's purblind steeds  
Would pull her by the purple mantle back  
And cast her in the ocean to her love.

(1.60–4)

It is a direct reference to Ovid's famous line, '*Lente, lente, currite noctis equi*' (Run slowly, slowly, horses of the night, *Amores* 1.13). This image was beloved of Elizabethan poets (see John Donne, 'The Sun Rising'), including those wanting to lend ominous colour to a dangerous situation. It is quoted by Marlowe's Faustus shortly before the end of his lease of life from the devil (*Doctor Faustus*, A-text, 13.64) and reversed as 'swift, swift you dragons of the night' by Iachimo as he metaphorically deflowers Imogen in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (2.2.48).

Arden accuses Alice of calling on Mosby in her sleep. She states that she must indeed have been asleep if she called his name 'For being awake he comes not within my thoughts' (l. 68). She then appeals to Franklin to corroborate that they had been talking about Mosby the previous evening at supper. The playwright, having invented Arden's friend as a necessary sounding board, seems not to be entirely sure—or not to care—how, when, or why, he got to Faversham.

Arden and Franklin then exit to go to the quay to supervise the unloading of a vessel. Alice is left on stage, but the action appears to have moved outdoors since she sees first Adam and then Mosby approach, as if they were coming down the street. Then Mosby and Alice apparently walk along the street together, stopping in front of the painter's house to request some poison. The dramatist thus envisages the stage setting in terms of classical comedy: a *frons scenae* with two different houses, an exit on one side to the port, and on the other to the marketplace. Such settings were often replicated in the staging of plays at court, Oxbridge colleges or the Inns of Court, where wooden frames covered in painted canvas might be constructed to represent the opposed houses. By contrast, an indeterminate setting is not unusual on the public Elizabethan stage, where a lack of stage scenery was sometimes exploited by dramatists, enabling them to shift between inside and outside, or private and public space, in the course of a single scene. *Arden of Faversham* does not quite follow either model.

Subsequently, Mosby and Alice are back in Arden's house, for he returns, wanting his breakfast before his departure for London. Mosby accosts him about the Abbey lands, claiming they had been offered to him by Greene, Sir Antony Ager's man. Ager (or Aucher) was

another self-made Kentish gentleman, who embezzled many of the fees that he collected as receiver in the Court of Augmentations, while also being a religious conservative.<sup>16</sup>

There is danger of a brawl as Arden rudely pulls out Mosby's sword; botchers and other handicraftsmen were not allowed to carry weapons. Alice then tells Arden to sit down at the table for breakfast. After her bungled attempt to poison him, and more coquettish play-acting of love, Arden departs. Mosby sees Greene approaching, who greets Alice as if she has crossed his path; he already knows that Arden is not at home. He too has a complaint about the Abbey lands: he had a former title to one of the properties, which is now 'cut off' by the grant to Arden (1.462). Greene wants revenge, and Alice now uses her charms on him to get his sympathy for Arden's supposed mistreatment of her.

The scene thus repeatedly interweaves thwarted aspirations for land with hopeless sexual desire: Arden wants Alice; Alice wants Mosby; Alice promises Mosby's sister to Michael; Alice encourages Mosby to promise his sister to Clarke the painter; Alice offers Greene back his land if he will help in the murder. The redistribution of ancient land holdings seems symptomatic of the disruption of social, sexual, and familial ties, and vice versa. Perhaps it is not surprising that the scene merges public and private space, when that which should be kept private is common currency, and when rights to property and marriage relations are both so insecure. The psychology of it is interesting, although the stagecraft and the grasp of what each character knows is perhaps a little shaky.

We do not know whether this play was written with a specific theatre in mind, but in the closing scenes of the play, Arden's counting house is where Black Will and Shakebag wait for his return home, and where the murderers initially hide his body. If the stage was equipped with a so-called 'discovery space' in the centre back wall, this would have been ideal. The use of such a space for the opening of the play between Arden and Franklin, and again at the end would make a visual link between Arden's acquisition of the Abbey lands and his murder, underscoring the link provided in the text. It is Greene's anger at being ousted from his property by Arden that prompts him into becoming one of Alice Arden's accomplices. But Greene is an unsympathetic character, and the widow in *Holinshed* is perhaps too outspoken. The play, however, brings her husband back to life; Reede, a sailor on his way back to sea arrives at the end specifically to remind the audience of Arden's dishonest dealings:

about the plot of ground  
Which wrongfully you detain from me:  
Although the rent of it be very small,  
Yet will it help my wife and children,  
Which here I leave in Faversham.

(13.12–16)

## A SENSE OF PLACE

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The story of Arden's murder ranges far beyond Faversham, up to London, and through the marshes towards Sheppey. It is the job of the playwright somehow to bring a sense of this topography onto the stage. Travellers to London would have followed the

London road (the old Roman Watling Street) through Rochester as far as Gravesend where they might have taken a boat, as Arden does in both the source and the play for the last leg of the journey into the capital, taking advantage of the tidal flow. Greene later instructs Michael to ensure that Arden misses the next ebb tide so that Black Will and Shakebag can travel before him to the appointed ambush place on Rainham Down, an open stretch of country between the Medway towns of Rainham and Rochester (7.27–9).

The ground to the north of Faversham was and still is marshy, while Sheppey, where Sir Thomas Cheyne rebuilt the family home in palatial style—Shurland Hall near Eastchurch, now a ruin—was only accessible by one of two ferries across the Swale: the King's Ferry, now the site of the only bridges; and the Harty Ferry, near Faversham, which is the one referred to in the play. The mist that makes Black Will and Shakebag miss their way was indeed a feature of the place, but their encounter with the Harty ferryman owes a debt to Ovid's description of the river Styx, where Charon ferried the dead to the underworld, but where newly departed souls know not the way:

There is a steepe and irksome way obscure with shadow fell  
Of balefull yewgh, all sad and still, that leadeth downe to hell.  
The foggie Styx doth breath up mistes; and downe this way doe wave  
The ghostes of persons lately dead and buried in the grave.  
Continuall colde and gastly feare possesse this queachie plot  
On eyther side: the siely Ghost new parted knoweth not  
The way that doth directly leade him to the Stygian Citie.

(Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, trans. Arthur Golding, 1567, bk 4, p. 50)

The corresponding scene in the play is tempered by an awareness of the problems of staging such effects in a public theatre in broad daylight. There can be no lighting change, or fog effects as would be possible in the modern theatre. Black Will and Shakebag enter, perhaps carrying lanterns, and acting as though they cannot see.

SHAKEBAG: Oh Will where art thou?  
BLACK WILL: Here, Shakebag, almost in hell's mouth, where  
I cannot see my way for smoke.  
SHAKEBAG: I pray thee speak still that we may meet by the sound,  
for I shall fall into some ditch or other, unless my feet see  
better than my eyes.  
BLACK WILL: Didst thou ever see better weather to run away with  
another man's wife?

(12.1–8)

In the midst of some further jokes that such dark days will keep chandlers (candle sellers) in business, Shakebag hears horses, and Black Will concludes they must be Arden's: 'then all our labour's lost'. Shakebag, optimistically but illogically says that 'haply' Arden will get lost too 'then we may chance meet with them'. The pair continue to grope about, as Black Will says 'like a couple of blind pilgrims', and then Shakebag falls into a ditch—the stage trap door. The Ferryman enters in response to his cries; the place is not as deserted as they might have hoped. Black Will pretends that nothing has happened, but

the Ferryman knows what he has heard and observes that it serves them right for going in such a place in such conditions without a guide (12.10–29).

It is a classic of physical comedy and the device is repeated in other later plays. In Henry Porter's *Two Angry Women of Abingdon* (published 1599), characters crash around the stage, supposedly in the dark, and also fall into a ditch, while in *A Woman Will Have Her Will* (acted 1599) some foreign merchants are led a merry dance bumping into the stage pillars which they are told are widely separated London landmarks. In other scenes, however, *Arden* more closely imitates Ovid's tendency to characterize darkness as something tangible, a merger of day and night, sky and earth, that lends a sense of portentous emotion to the scene:

Black night hath hid the pleasures of the day  
And sheeting darkness overhangs the earth  
And with the black fold of her cloudy robe  
Obscures us from the eyesight of the world,  
In which sweet silence such as we triumph.

(*Arden* 5.1–5)

This is an ordinary London street as described by Shakebag. The language seems almost wasted on this character, anticipating, as it does, the material darkness of Macbeth's 'Light thickens and the crow / Makes wing to th'rooky wood' (*Macbeth* 3.2.50–1). Here though, it gives scope for overacting, and as he continues, it becomes clearer that Shakebag is trying to spook Greene to get him out of the way. Once Greene departs, Shakebag's language becomes more colloquial. Black Will, however, has forebodings and seems to be a cross between Macbeth and the reluctant murderer of Clarence in *Richard III*.

I tell thee Shakebag, would this thing were done,  
I am so heavy that I can scarce go:  
This drowsiness in me bodes little good.

(5.15–17)

Arden too foreshadows that play, his dream not unlike that of Clarence in both metaphor and rhythm:

[ARDEN] This night I dream'd that being in a park,  
A toil was pitch'd to overthrow the deer,  
And I upon a little rising hill,  
Stood whistly watching for the herd's approach.  
Even there, methoughts, a gentle slumber took me,  
And summon'd all my parts to sweet repose.  
But in the pleasure of this golden rest  
An ill-thew'd foster had removed the toil,  
And rounded me with that beguiling home  
Which late, methought, was pitch'd to cast the deer ... (*Arden*, 6.6–15)

CLARENCE: Methoughts that I had broken from the Tower  
And was embark'd to cross to Burgundy;  
And in my company my brother Gloucester,

Who from my cabin tempted me to walk  
 Upon the hatches....  
 As we pac'd along  
 Upon the giddy footing of the hatches,  
 Methought that Gloucester stumbled and in falling  
 Struck me that thought to stay him overboard  
 Into the tumbling billows of the main.  
 O Lord, methought, what pain it was to drown,  
 What dreadful noise of waters in my ears,  
 What sights of ugly death within my eyes!

(*Richard III*, 1.4.9–23)

The two dream accounts repeatedly use the word 'methought', but the similarities between them are not just verbal. They also share a fluidity of rhythm.

A similarity in style to another playwright in one of the earlier scenes, however, seems to be a case of satirical imitation. The servant Michael writes to his beloved, Mosby's sister Susan, who, as he knows, is also being courted by the painter Clarke:

This is to certify you that, as the turtle true when she hath lost her mate sitteth alone, so I, mourning for your absence, do walk up and down Paul's till one day I fell asleep and lost my master's pantofles. Ah, Mistress Susan, abolish that paltry painter, cut him off by the shins with a frowning look of your crabbed countenance, and think upon Michael who, drunk with the dregs of your favour, will cleave as fast to your love as a plaster of pitch to a galled horseback. (3.5–8)

This passage, with its 'as...so...' construction imitates the trademark style of John Lyly (1554–1606), which he developed for his prose romance, *Euphues*. But Michael's ineptitude, both as a servant in losing his master's slippers, and in his choice of language and image, with its inappropriate use of 'crabbed' and horse plasters, renders Lyly's witty style merely ridiculous. Paul's of course features in the source story, but the reference here in the context of the style may not be accidental. Lyly was associated with the St Paul's boys' acting company during the 1580s until the company's dissolution in 1591 because of its (and his) scandalous involvement with the Martin Marprelate religious controversy. His *Endymion* (probably performed at court on 2 February 1588)<sup>17</sup> is of particular relevance, since it involves the story of the love of two rivals, Endymion and Tellus, for the Moon, thus mirroring the liaisons in *Arden*. Alice Arden makes a reference to this story towards the end of the play as Black Will and Shakebag go into the counting house, closing the door behind them, to wait for Arden's homecoming:

ALICE: Ah, would he now were here, that it might open.  
 I shall no more be closed in Arden's arms,  
 That like the snakes of black Tisiphone  
 Sting me with their embracing's. Mosby's arms  
 Shall compass me, and, were I made a star,  
 I would have none other spheres but those.  
 There is no nectar but in Mosby's lips;

Had chaste Diana kiss'd him, she like me  
 Would grow lovesick, and from her wat'ry bower  
 Fling down Endymion and snatch him up.  
 Then blame not me that slay a silly man  
 Not half so lovely as Endymion.

(14.147–58)

This passage too, with her hubristic hope that she might be ‘made a star’, is infused with Ovid (cf. *Fasti* and the end of *Metamorphoses*), but more in respect to events and stories, than its use of language. Tisiphone is the Fury in *Metamorphoses* 4 whose arms and hair are entwined with snakes; she kills by darting these at her victim, whose mind, rather than body, is poisoned with their venom, prompting the victim to murder members of their own family. Here, Alice makes Arden’s arms the snakes that sting her into murdering him.

## AUTHORSHIP

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Like many plays printed in the early 1590s, *Arden of Faversham* is anonymous. Edward Jacob, an eighteenth-century antiquary living in Faversham, was the first to claim the play for Shakespeare, and others have seen a coded authorship in the names Black Will and Shakebag. Conceivably, the collocation of Will and Shake, combined with the comic potential of these villains in their incompetence, might have attracted a young William Shakespeare to the story. In the nineteenth century, the power of some of the writing in the play led the poet Swinburne, the editor Charles Knight, and the play’s French translator, the novelist Victor Hugo, to support the case for Shakespeare’s authorship, although this was denied or ignored by most twentieth-century critics and authors. Other contenders have been Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe.

The case for Shakespeare, however, was reopened by Macdonald P. Jackson using various techniques of statistical linguistic analysis.<sup>18</sup> His most recent study concentrates on scene 8 in the play, the famous quarrel between Mosby and Alice, and uses the Chadwick Healey database Literature On-Line in order to search systematically for plays that share particular collocations of words with this scene, for example pairings of words that occur within five words of each other. Before the advent of this technique, attempts to ascribe authorship through use of imagery were haphazard, limited to what the scholar had read and could remember. Of the 143 available plays surviving from the period 1580–1600, Jackson has found 28 that share four or more phrases or significant word-pairings with this scene, of which 17 are by Shakespeare. Startlingly, the plays that top his list with between 19 and 8 such correspondences are all early plays by Shakespeare: e.g., 2 and 3 *Henry VI*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Richard III*.

While Jackson claims that the play is entirely by Shakespeare, he believes (with some other commentators) that ‘the text suffers from some form of memorial contamination’.<sup>19</sup> The play’s language, however, is more even, and in the central scenes more

powerful, than one might expect of a reconstruction. But there are some disconnections of storyline.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the discrepancies in scene 1 already noted, the first three scenes are imperfectly married to those in the middle. Mosby's order of a poisoned crucifix from the painter is not entirely followed through. In scene 1, Arden tells Alice he intends to stay in London with Franklin, whereas in scene 4 he needs to be persuaded to do so. Bradshaw suddenly appears out of nowhere, travelling with Greene in scene 2, his function (as in the source) being to identify Black Will, and immediately carry a letter back to Alice. Yet when she reads this letter aloud in scene 8, it has acquired a more dramatically powerful function, adding to her anxiety, and our anticipation, by telling her that the London trip has been abortive and that they will try to murder Arden on the way home.

Using a different set of statistical linguistic tests, analysing the frequency of function words, and of rare words, Arthur Kinney has argued that Shakespeare is more likely than other authors to have been responsible for scenes 4–9, and also scene 16.<sup>21</sup> This division of the writing explains the discrepancies we have noted, and matches the different uses of Ovid. Scenes 4–9 contain a higher proportion of lines that are not end-stopped, and a greater number of images culled from country life—both Shakespearean trademarks. As we have seen, it is also these scenes that give the characters (even Black Will and Shakebag) a more complex range of emotions and motivations. The outer scenes maintain the providentialism in the second edition of *Holinshed* and in the later pamphlets. The central scenes, by contrast, are much more interested in the psychology of the characters, and are occasionally sceptical, even humorous, about religion. The quarrel between Black Will and Shakebag, for instance, ends with Black Will promising to hold off for another time, but an unusually descriptive stage direction states: 'Then he kneels down and holds up his hands to heaven'. He might resume this pose when Cheyne enters, foiling the murder attempt, for in response to Cheyne's cynical greeting he replies: 'I am your beadsman, bound to pray for you' (9.121), perhaps suggesting that Cheyne is merely a more successful robber baron. Then, left alone on stage, the would-be murderers curse Arden's 'holy luck', while Greene gives the standard providential response: 'The Lord of Heaven hath preserved him'. Black Will, however, neatly punctures this thought: 'The Lord of Heaven a fig. The Lord Cheyne hath preserved him' (9.145).

## PLOT CONSTRUCTION

Whether or not Shakespeare had a hand in this play, he could have learnt a good deal from it. His acknowledged work invariably combines two or more different stories in one plot. This complicates the story that he finds in his main source and enables him to introduce characters who can be placed in situations that mirror those of the characters in the main story. Such 'repetition with difference' provides multiple perspectives and allows audiences to come to their own conclusions about difficult ethical problems. Thomas Arden's story already has some such repetitions: the successive bungled attempts at murder; and various conflicted claims to the Abbey lands. As we have seen, it did not take

much adjustment for the triangle Arden, Alice, and Mosby to become reflected in Michael, Susan, and Clarke.

Perhaps the main reason why twentieth-century critics were loath to see Shakespeare's hand in the play is that its date (c.1588–90) does not fit the currently received wisdom that he started out in about 1592 by rewriting other men's work. Yet a topical reference in *The Comedy of Errors* to France 'making war against her heir' (3.2.123) only makes complete sense in the summer of 1589, before the designated heir, Henri of Navarre, became king.<sup>22</sup> This in turn means that on stylistic grounds, other plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* must be even earlier.

Recently statistical linguistic analysis of *Titus* and of *1 Henry VI* appears to confirm that these plays too are 'collaborative', and, as with *Arden*, Shakespeare seems not to have written the opening scenes. I suggest that far from being a 'play patcher' and plagiarist, he was a play plotter and producer—not just a writer, but an entrepreneur in the theatre. Such business dealing is the best explanation for Shakespeare's unusual wealth—his ability to acquire a share in the leading company of the day, and to buy the second biggest house in Stratford, all by the time he was 33. Having set out the plot or scheme for a play, he would commission others to write the expository opening scenes, reserving the central sections for his own particular skill: the ability to complicate the plot and turn moral certainty to moral ambiguity.<sup>23</sup> It is this ambiguity that has enabled his acknowledged plays to withstand the test of time, and which numbers of critics have found in the central scenes of *Arden of Faversham*.<sup>24</sup>

The text of *Arden* published in 1592 cannot have been the finished prompt copy. That was too valuable to be released to the printers, since the process of printing tends to destroy manuscripts, which usually get broken up in the process. Instead, if the explanation of its collaborative authorship is accepted, the copy behind the printed text would have been a mix of redundant manuscripts: the draft Shakespeare received from his collaborator for the outer scenes; his own draft of the central scenes; the epilogue written perhaps for a specific early performance, which may not have been repeated in subsequent performances.<sup>25</sup> Quite how the finished play might have read and whether all the loose ends were tidied up, we shall never know.

## NOTES

Quotations from *Arden of Faversham* are taken from *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies*, ed. Keith Sturgess (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969). Those from Shakespeare are from William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

1. BL Harl. Ms 542. Plut XLVIII B, transcribed Hyde, pp. 118–24; Chambers *Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), vol. IV, p. 4.
2. The crime of petty treason was not abolished until 1828. See <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Crimes.jsp#pettytreason>.
3. William Lambarde claimed that 'especially in the partes nearer to London' Kentish gentry were not of such ancient stock as elsewhere in the country, and that London 'courtiers,

- lawyers and merchants be continually translated' into their number, *A Perambulation of Kent* (1576), p. 10, but this was perhaps *only* true in the northwest of the county nearest London. C. W. Chalklin, *Seventeenth-Century Kent: A Social and Economic History* (London: Longmans, 1965), suggests that most of the gentry families had lived in the county since at least the fifteenth century, but that there was a preponderance of smaller estates, worth less than £500 per year.
4. This section is indebted to the researches of Patricia Hyde, the historian of Faversham, *Thomas Arden: The Man behind the Myth* (Faversham: The Faversham Society, 1996). See also Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent, 1500–1640* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977); Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).
  5. Consistory Court deposition register (DCb/X.10.3 fol. 83, dated 13 November 1548, in which he describes himself as 40 years old; cited by Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture*, p. 21; printed in Hyde *Thomas Arden*, p. 126.
  6. Hyde, *Thomas Arden*, pp. 19–26, following the suggestion in Stow, *The History of a moste horrible murder Commyted at Fevershame in Kente*, BL, Harl. MSS 542 fols. 34–37b, printed in Hyde, *Thomas Arden*, p. 117.
  7. Hyde, *Thomas Arden*, p. 28.
  8. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
  9. <http://www.cinqueports.org>; Stanford Lehmberg, 'Cheyne, Sir Thomas (c.1485–1558)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; on-line edn., January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5263> (accessed 21 February 2011).
  10. Sandwich and subsidiary ports, customs book, PRO: E122 130/s, BL Cotton Charter xiii.12, printed in Hyde, *Thomas Arden*, pp. 164–83; 548–9.
  11. Hyde, *Thomas Arden*, p. 45.
  12. *Ibid.*, pp. 73–4.
  13. Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005), 1–32, and 'Structures of Popularity in the Early Modern Book Trade', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005), 206–13.
  14. Peter W. M. Blayney, 'The Publication of Playbooks', in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 383–422.
  15. Hyde, *Thomas Arden*, p. 292.
  16. J. D. Alsop, 'Aucher, Sir Anthony (d. 1558)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; on-line edn., January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68012> (accessed 21 February 2011).
  17. E. K. Chambers *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), vol. II, p. 18.
  18. M. P. Jackson, 'Material for an Edition of *Arden of Faversham*' (BLitt thesis, Oxford University, 1963); 'Shakespearean Features of the Poetic Style of *Arden of Faversham*', *Archiv für das Studium der neuen Sprachen und Literaturen* (Verlag, 1993), Band 230/2, pp. 279–304; M. P. Jackson, 'Shakespeare and the Quarrel Scene in *Arden of Faversham*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.3 (Fall 2006), 249–93, outlines the history of ascriptions to Shakespeare, Kyd, and Marlowe (pp. 253–6).
  19. Jackson, 'Shakespeare and the Quarrel Scene in *Arden of Faversham*', p. 254.
  20. See Laurie E. Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The 'Bad' Quartos and Their Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 232–3.

21. Arthur Kinney, 'Authoring Arden of Faversham', in *Shakespeare, Computers, and the Mystery of Authorship*, ed. Hugh Craig and Arthur Kinney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 78–99. But see Lena B. Petersen, *Shakespeare's Errant Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), who finds evidence of Kyd's authorship.
22. T. S. Dorsch and Ros King, eds., *The Comedy of Errors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 38.
23. Ros King, *A Beginner's Guide to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2011), pp. 48–59.
24. Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare Co-Author* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) analyses the stylistic evidence for the shared writing of this play, although he does not consider Shakespeare's role as plotter (pp. 148–243).
25. Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 81–117.