Writing the whore in Early Modern drama

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Calling a woman a whore is

• A way of keeping “troubling individuals grouped in their marginalised place and to insist that the place is a vulgar, degraded one from which they can never escape”

(Stanton 2000, 81)
Stanton (2000) looks at every instance in Shakespeare’s plays for the lemma ‘whore’

- Whore (45x)
- Whore’s (2x)
- Whores (8x)
- Whoreish (1x)
- Whoring (1x)
- Whored (1x)
- Bewhored (1x)
So what?

- Stanton uses two ancient and antiquated pieces of technology called ‘a concordance’ and ‘a dictionary’

- Take this approach, WIDEN
Shakespeare Comedies & City Comedies

- Known quantity baseline (Shakespeare’s Comedies)
- Mostly Contemporary plays by a range of authors (City Comedies)
  - Jonson, Dekker, Middleton, Massinger, Sharpham, Chapman, Barry
City comedy is defined by

London setting, socially heterogeneous characters, trickery, mockery, social mobility, moral ambiguity… (Bruster 2005, 32)
Methods

1. Get a list of words associated with ‘whore’ from the Historical Thesaurus of the OED
2. Make a list of rules to use for text-tagging with Ubiquity
3. Measure frequencies in both Shx comedies and City Comedies
Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary

http://historicalthesaurus.gla.ac.uk
http://www.oed.com/thesaurus/ (£)
1. the external world > abstract properties > action or operation > endeavour > attempt [verb (transitive)] > strive for or after > something false or unworthy ➤ whore (1913)

2. the mind > the will > will, wish, or inclination > desire > aspiration or ambition > aspire [verb (intransitive)] > pursue something false or unworthy ➤ whore (1913)

3. society > morality > moral evil > moral or spiritual degeneration > [noun] > corruption > corrupt community ➤ whore (1382)

4. society > morality > moral evil > lack of principle or integrity > [noun] > lack of scruple > unscrupulous or unprincipled person ➤ whore (1633)

5. society > morality > moral evil > licentiousness > unchastity > [noun] > sexual indulgence > unchaste behaviour of woman > unchaste or loose woman ➤ whore (c1275)

6. society > morality > moral evil > licentiousness > unchastity > [verb (intransitive)] > associate with loose woman ➤ whore (1583)

7. society > morality > moral evil > licentiousness > unchastity > unchaste [verb (transitive)] > ➤ whore (1681)

8. society > morality > moral evil > licentiousness > unchastity > loss of chastity > deprive of chastity [verb (transitive)] > a woman > bring to condition of whore ➤ whore (1604)

9. society > morality > moral evil > licentiousness > unchastity > prostitution > [noun] > a prostitute ➤ whore (a1100)

10. society > morality > moral evil > licentiousness > unchastity > prostitution > [verb (intransitive)] > practise prostitution ➤ whore (1583)
society > morality > moral
evil > licentiousness > unchastity
There are 10 available subcategories relevant to issues of unchastity

— [noun]
— [adjective]
— [adverb]
— [verb (intransitive)]
— unchaste [verb (transitive)]
— [phrase]
— lasciviousness or lust
— loss of chastity
— fornication, adultery, or incest
— prostitution
Historical terms for whores: by the numbers

• 1,497 phrases or individual lexemes for ‘whores’ or the action of being whorish

• Narrow to those in use during Shakespeare’s life (in use between 1564-1616)
  – E.g. adultery (1st cited by OED in 1405) still in use between 1564-1616

------> to 304 words
Five Ways of Talking about Whores in Shakespearean England

1. The state of being unchaste or a whore; ways of describing one who is unchaste or whorish or associates with individuals who are whores

2. Sexual desire and the indulgence of lust

3. Dishonour and negativity attached to sexual deviance (real or imagined)

4. The loss of virginity/fornication

5. Violence
The state of being unchaste or a whore (a sample)

- bitchery, brothel, brothels, brothelly, common stale, commoners, commoner, community, crushabell, crushabells, cunts, cunt, curtal, curtals, customers, customer, doll-commoner, doll-commons, doll-common, drivelling, forwhore, hackster, hacksters, hackney, harlot, harlots, harloting, harloting, harlotise, harlotised, harlotises, harlotize, harlotized, harlotizes, harlotry, harlotry, hell-months, hell-mouth, hiren, hirens, incontinence, incontinency, incontinent, jumblers, jumbler, keep a woman, land-frigate, light-heels, lighted-tailed, loose in the hilts, loose-legged, loose-tailed, mermaid, mermaids, miss, molls, moll, night-worm, night-worms, occupant, pagans, pagan, paphians, paphian, polecats, polecat, prostitutes, prostitute, prostituted, prostitution, public commoners, walk-street, wench out, wench, wenched, wenchel, wenchels, wenches, wenching, whore-lust, whore-lusts, whore-man, whore-men, whore, whoredom, whoreishness, whorekeeper, whorekeepers, whoremaser, whoremonger, whoremongering, whores, whoring, whorish, whorishly, whoreishness, whory, ETC
Sexual desire and the indulgence of lust (all)

- By-lusting, cockish, cockishness, cocky, concuspiscential, covet, coveting, covetous, effeminate, flesh-lusts, flesh-lust, hot-backed, lascivient, lascivious, lascivity, lecher, lechers, lecherer, lecherhead, lecherness, lecherous, lecherous, lechery, libidinosity, libidious, libidiousness, liburical, lickering, lickerous, lickerousness, lickster, lubric, lubricity, lubricous, lust-breathed, lust, lusting, luster, lustful, lustfulness, lustihead, lustiness, lustiness, lusting, lustly, lustre, lusty laurence, lusty lawrence, luxe, luxur, luxurious, luxuriousness, luxurity, luxury, man-wood, rampant, ruttish, salacity, saltness, saucy, to go to sault, venerial, venerian, venerian, venerious, veneriousness, venerist
Dishonour and negativity attached to sexual deviance (real or imagined) (All)

- a fate worse than death, adulter, adulterate, adulterated, adulterer, adulterers, adulterise, adulterize, adulterous, adulterousness, attempt, attempter, behorn, byhore, bywhore, cornute cornuted, cornutes, cornuto, corruption, cuckally, cuckold-maker, cuckold, cuckoldry, cuckoldos, cuckoldy, cuckquean, cuckqueans, defiler, dishonor, dishonored, dishonour, dishonoured, forked, foul, fulyie, horn-mad, horn-maker, horn, horned, horner, horning, hornity, ram-head, ruin, shame, spouse-break, spouse-breaking, to give horns to, unconstant, unfaithful, vitiate, vitiating, vitiation, wedlock-break, wedlock-breaking, worse than death
Loss of Virginity/Fornication (all)

- bawding, bawdry, constupration, defile, defloration, deflourish, deflower, deflowerer, deflowering, defouling, depucel, depucelate, dettorate, devirginisation, devirginization, devrginate, dismaiden, mackerelage, maintainer, panderage, pandering, panderirms
Violence (all)

- rape, raped, raping, raper, rapture, ravener, ravishment, ravishment, stupration, tup, unmaiden, unmaidening, violation, violation, violator, abuse, abuser
http://vep.cs.wisc.edu/ubiq/
Finding #1

• Shakespeare’s comedies are found at the bottom of each chart
Finding #2

- Roaring Girl (Dekker/Middleton)
- The Family of Love (Dekker/Middleton)
- Cupid’s Whirligig (Edward Sharpham)
- Michaelmas Term (Middleton)
- Mad World my Masters (Middleton)
Why is *Roaring Girl* consistently ranked highly?

**Tag: Whore**
- moll
- whore
- wench
- venture
- whores
- miss
- trug
- wenches
- harlots
- wenching
- mermaid
- hackney
- prostitute
- strumpets

**Tag: Dishonor**
- shame
- foul
- ruin
- cuckold
- cuckold
- corruption
- horn
- dishonored
Why is *Roaring Girl* consistently ranked highly?

**Tag: Lust**
- lust
- covetous
- lickering
- rampant
- luster

**Tag: Violence**
- abuse
The Family of Love Act 4, Sc 2
TCPID A07495

She begins to nibble, twill take in faith -- mistress
I see some coffeehouse in your looks,
Care ill befittes so delicate a spirit.
Be frolic wench for he that is so near thee
has been much nearer?

That Accent sounds sweet music, it is my love.
That tongue breaths life into my liueles spirits
Gerardine! o rapture, why thus disguised!

No more, be mute; thus must I vary forms
To bring our Cares to end her lealously,
Ensues this Dryft, which if it take true scope,
Loves joy comes next be fearelesse in that hope:

It is so: Ratsbane: I hate, it rack’s on it torments me here it is, -- Woe worth
the time that ever I gave suck to a Child that came in at the window god knows
how villainous Leacher; Yet if you did but see, how like the little red headed
knave is to his Father damnable Doctor: A Bastard in the Country, and an other
toward here J am out of doubt, this is his wo^ke. You are an Arrant Strumpet,
Incest, fornication, abomination in my own house; intolerable; O for long
There is a sweet Legacy, 
I am almost choked with it.

Next I bequeath to that foul whore his Wife, 
All barrenness of Joy, a drouth of Virtue, 
And dearth of all repentance: For her end, 
The common misery of an English Strumpet, 
In French and Dutch, beholding ere she dies 
Confusion of her Brats before her Eyes, 
And never shed a tear for it.

Where is the Knight? 
O Sir, the Gentleman you wounded, is newly departed.
HERMIA O me! You juggler, you cankerblossom, You thief of love! What, have you come by night And stolen my love's heart from him? HELENA Fine, in faith. Have you no modesty, no maiden shame, No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear Impatient answers from my gentle tongue? Fie, fie, you counterfeit, you puppet, you!

A Midsummer Night’s Dream (3.2.299-303)
• PROSPERO Thou most lying slave, Whom stripes may move, not kindness, I have used thee, filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee in mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate the honor of my child.

(Tempest 1.2.412-417)
Conclusions

• I have shown wider view of how the concept of a lack of chastity functions in Shakespeare’s England.
  – 5 unique categories of whorishness covering a variety of contexts

• More terms than Stanton can keep track of!
Conclusions

• And tested on a more varied corpus
• Shakespeare and his contemporaries both use these terms, but there is variation

  – City comedies are more likely to use these terms than Shakespeare’s comedies
Future directions

• Observe variation across larger x-section of comedies
  – Change over time?
  – Periodic style?
  – Theatre companies?
  – Potential marker for authorship?
Thanks!