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The Raw and the Cooked in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

At the conclusion of Ford's best known play, Giovanni enters his brother-in-law's birthday feast with his sister's heart skewered on the end of his dagger. The moment, which puts a fittingly sensationalistic point to the steamily incestuous relationship between Giovanni and Annabella, is in no way reducible to the final extravagance of a decadent genre, revenge tragedy. Certainly, as Ronald Huebert has argued, the moment can be considered baroque in its 'fusion of sensuous and sacred impulses'.¹ But if the tableau of Giovanni brandishing his sister's heart is baroque, it is so not only blasphemously but also somewhat bathetically. Indeed, whatever Giovanni's pretensions to a metaphysical poetics reminiscent of Donne, Herbert, or Alabaster, the scene deliberately runs the risk of comedy. Remarkably, Giovanni's onstage audience takes a very long time to grasp the significance of Giovanni's performance art. 'What means this?' asks the Cardinal; 'What strange riddle's this?' Vasques echoes after Giovanni has tried to explain the meaning of 'this' (5.6.14, 30).² The dialogue of incomprehension continues until Giovanni puts the matter as bluntly as possible — '[t]hese hands have from her bosom ripped this heart' (60) — and Vasques returns to the stage to verify the assertion: "'Tis most strangely true' (61). Antecedents for such cognitive failure run as far back as Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, where in the final scene an onstage audience fails to recognize the real murders that have taken place before their very eyes. In Kyd's play, however, the theatre of Hieronimo's play-within-a-play (and the curtain at the back of the stage that conceals Horatio's body) disguises the reality of the dead corpse. Once that veil is stripped away, the onstage audience quickly both recognizes what has occurred and responds to it with the appropriately tragic anger and desire for revenge. In Ford's play, by contrast, it is precisely the absence of any sort of veil that creates the problem. Quite literally, Giovanni enters the scene with his sister's bloody heart on the end of his dagger, and his purpose is to display that heart *as a heart*. As a piece of warm, raw meat rather than metaphor or

symbol, however, the heart is unrecognizable. Flourishing the heart at the astonished onlookers, he says, 'Look well upon't; d'ee know't?' (28). Do you know it? Well, no. The heart is unparticularizable, visible only as just another piece of uncooked flesh now out of place, properly belonging in the kitchen rather than the banquet hall. If in *Titus Andronicus* flesh of whatever kind must still be cooked in order to be served, in *'Tis Pity* Ford concludes by confronting the onstage audience, and the offstage audience I would contend, with the completely raw, with the undifferentiated dead meat of the real. This moment of traumatic confrontation confounds the patriarchal symbolic order within which Giovanni and his society articulate their opposition in terms of nature and culture. It constitutes the Lacanian anamorphic blot or stain, the "detail that does not belong," that sticks out, is "out of place," does not make any sense within the frame,³ and its obtrusion in the play's final moments reveals the secret complicity between the Petrarchan poetics of Giovanni's incestuous desire and the mercantile metaphors of the exchange of women. Though ostensibly competing symbolic systems, both attempt to domesticate or 'humanize' the traumatic, material real that constitutes the unstable and unrecognizable threshold of 'civilization'. In its concluding moments Ford's play steps beyond that threshold, only to retreat from its horror and leave the patriarchal symbolic order intact.

Contemporary critics have generally ignored this scene's comic potential, preferring instead to register its exceptionally spectacular force as shock rather than laughter. As Alan Dessen observes, however, directors of the play ignore the comic potential at their peril. To illustrate his point, Dessen recounts what happened during 'a production at Yale in the 1960s where the audience, fully engaged with the action up to this moment [the moment at the beginning of 5.6, when Giovanni enters 'with a heart upon his dagger' (sd 9)], burst into gales of laughter when someone in the auditorium was heard to whisper quite audibly: "My God, that's a heart on his dagger!"⁴ The contradictions manifest in this moment are multiple, from the audible whisper of the one audience member to the distancing laughter triggered by the deep immersion in the play revealed by that whisper. This immersion is especially problematic because, of course, whatever else Yale students in the sixties were doing, they weren't using human hearts as stage props. To laugh at the momentary inability to distinguish between the imaginary and the real or, more broadly, the cultural and the biological, is perhaps unfair, but it also points to what Richard Madelaine has described as the complex sensationalism of this moment: 'The appalling gore of the spectacle is intended to make

the audience apprehend in its apprehensiveness; the reality of the unripping is central to the meaning of the play, and the audience's recognition must be emotional as well as intellectual'.⁵ Madelaine's statement suggests that the emotional and intellectual can be fully, albeit complexly, fused in the audience's response. Dessen's anecdote suggests otherwise: in the amplified form it takes in the Yale audience's bifurcated reactions, the disjunctive or centrifugal impetus of the shock and the bathos is pushed to a breaking point that focuses attention on the lack of fusion in the spectacle Giovanni creates. In this moment Ford's play risks comedy — indeed, must risk comedy — in order to confront the audience with the disjunction between the imaginary and the real.

More specifically, the moment risks comedy in order to confront the audience with the disjunction between imaginary and real female bodies. The play's men cannot comprehend female bodies except insofar as they are semi-otically coded or, in Claude Levi-Strauss's apt term, 'cooked',⁶ transformed from nature into culture through the artifices of society's symbolic systems. Judith Butler observes that in Levi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology the female body is acculturated through the exogamous processes of exchange upon which heterosexual, patriarchal societies are founded:

the object of exchange that both consolidates and differentiates kinship relations is *women*, given as gifts from one patrilineal clan to another through the institution of marriage. The bride, the gift, the object of exchange constitutes 'a sign and a value' that opens a channel of exchange that not only serves the *functional* purpose of facilitating trade but performs the *symbolic* or *ritualistic* purpose of consolidating the internal bonds, the collective identity, of each clan differentiated through the act. In other words, the bride functions as a relational term between groups of men.⁷

Women's bodies are signs as much as they are flesh and blood. Annabella's heart illustrates the complexity of this duality. In his article on the significance of the heart in Ford's play, Michael Neill remarks upon 'the curious double existence enjoyed by the human body in early modern culture: it was both a biological entity and an assembly of emblematically arranged parts each with its own allegorical meanings, among which the heart as the supposed seat of the affections had a peculiar prominence'.⁸ As Jonathan Sawday documents in *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, this doubleness of the human body as both meat and

meaning, as real and textual tissue, can be observed even in early modern anatomy theatres and books: in the anatomy theatre, the anatomist reads a lecture upon the cadaver he has just dissected, while in the anatomy books the cadaver strikes emblematically significant — and at times erotic — poses.⁹

Several moments in *'Tis Pity* replicate the anatomy theatre in order to textualize the female body. In 3.6 the Friar turns his cell into an anatomy theatre as he hears Annabella's confession: 'You have unripped a soul so foul and guilty, / As I must tell you true, I marvel how / The earth hath borne you up' (2–4), the Friar tells Annabella, then urging her to 'weep faster yet, / Whiles I do read a lecture' (5). Here the opened female body provides the grotesque material vehicle for the metaphor's metaphysical tenor in the opening example of the lurid, brimstone-and-damnation rhetoric that the Friar will subsequently employ to bring Annabella to repentance for her incest. The Friar's metaphor proleptically figures Annabella's sinful soul as her incestuous body's double, coding both as supine, mutilated objects offered up to male scrutiny, commentary, and regulation. In 4.3 another female body, that of Soranzo's jilted adulterous lover Hippolita, becomes the cadaver at the centre of a wedding feast transformed into an anatomy theatre. Hippolita enters the banquet celebrating Soranzo and Annabella's wedding uninvited and unexpected, through the ruse of a masque of virgins offered as a gesture of reconciliation with Soranzo and renunciation of any claim she might have on him. Her plan to revenge herself on Soranzo by poisoning him is known only to Vasques, whom she thinks she has suborned to help her carry the plan out. When Vasques proves his loyalty to his master by poisoning her rather than Soranzo, she begins to die on stage while Vasques explains her plot to the other guests and expounds to them the moral: her death is 'a just payment in her own coin' (84). Vasques plays the role of authoritative male lecturer possessed of the truth about the female body, and the onstage audience members unquestioningly accept Vasques's lecture as truth, although they have no reason to do so and Hippolita has yet to say anything incriminating. Immediately after all the guests proclaim 'Wonderful justice!' (85), Hippolita unrrips her sinful soul in a speech that further moralizes and textualizes her body. 'O, 'tis true' (87), she cries, interspersing with her confession descriptions of the 'heat above hell-fire' (90), 'cruel, cruel flames' (91), and other torments brought on by the poison. Hippolita's speech confirms the truth of Vasques's lecture and transforms her dying female body into an exemplum of the fate awaiting unchaste female bodies detailed earlier in Friar Bonaventure's lecture. The spectacle of Hippolita's dying body, then, functions like

the self-exposing female cadavers in early modern anatomy texts to confirm male mastery of knowledge and to illustrate the textualized female bodies that this knowledge constructs.

Accompanying the anatomization of the textualized female body in the play is its fragmentation into parts. As he woos Annabella in 1.2, Giovanni blazons her body into pieces that cohere as an image only on the reflecting surfaces of her mirror or his heart: after glossing in conventional Petrarchan fashion Annabella's 'eyes' (187), 'cheeks' (191), 'lips' (192), and 'hands' (192), Giovanni advises her to 'look in your glass' (197) to observe 'a beauty more exact / Than art can counterfeit' (195–6) or '[r]ip up my bosom; there thou shalt behold / A heart, in which is writ the truth I speak' (200–1). Men prescribe and provide the frames within which the female body is assembled as an imaginary totality. Crucially, Giovanni's blazon does not include Annabella's heart, as one might have expected. Rather, after blazoning her other body parts, Giovanni substitutes his own heart for Annabella's and tropes his heart as ground of her being: on his heart is written 'the truth I speak', the truth of her coherence as his Petrarchan idol or image. This imaginary coherence is figuratively and literally at the mercy of men. Giovanni blazons Annabella's body again in 2.5, this time not in order to woo his beloved but to titillate and taunt the Friar. 'View well her face' (49), he commands the Friar, and then rhetorically exposes various parts of Annabella's body before concluding 'But father, what else is for pleasure framed, / Lest I offend your ears, shall go unnamed' (57–8). Giovanni's Petrarchan rhetoric puts Annabella's body parts on display here as an assertion of masculine sexual mastery over the textualized female body. Later in the play that mastery takes the more savage form of dismemberment. 'Come, whore, tell me your lover' (4.3.57), Soranzo demands of Annabella after learning that she is pregnant, 'or by truth, / I'll hew thy flesh to shreds' (4.3.58). And, of course, at the conclusion of the play Giovanni exacts his revenge upon Soranzo and upon his sister by making good on Soranzo's threat.

Not only at its conclusion but throughout the play, the most prominent of the fragmented body parts is the heart. Throughout the play, the heart is troped as the site of the emotions, the spirit, and the will. 'Cry to thy heart' (1.1.72), the Friar urges Giovanni in the play's first scene. In the following scene Annabella confesses to Giovanni that 'what thou hast urged, / My captive heart had long ago resolved' (1.2.235–6). Giovanni answers Annabella's metaphor in 2.1 with 'be proud to know / That yielding thou hast conquered, and inflamed / A heart whose tribute is thy brother's life' (3–5).

In the following scene, Hippolita upbraids Soranzo by claiming that ‘a heart of steel’ (2.2.36) would have yielded to his ‘tears’ (35) and ‘oaths’ (35). In 4.2 Richardetto abandons his pursuit of revenge against Soranzo because his ‘heart persuades’ him (7) that Soranzo ‘will fall, and sink with his own weight’ (6). And at the end of 5.5, after he has murdered his sister and presumably torn out her heart, Giovanni employs the heart as a synecdoche in his exhortation to himself to carry through his revenge to its deadly conclusion: ‘Shrink not, courageous hand; stand up, my heart, / And boldly act my last and greatest part’ (105–6). The play also consistently tropes the heart as an object of exchange and possession. After witnessing the conflict between Grimaldi and Soranzo in 1.2, Florio seeks to reassure Soranzo by telling him ‘this is strange to me, / Why you should storm, having my word engaged: / Owing her heart, what need you doubt her ear?’ (51–3). Soranzo’s ownership of Annabella’s heart has potentially deadly consequences: ‘Soranzo is the man that hath her heart, / And while he lives, be sure you cannot speed’ (2.3.49–50), Richardetto informs Grimaldi before supplying him with poison for his sword and a plan with which to use the poisoned sword on Soranzo. In 5.5, again presumably while holding Annabella’s heart, Giovanni laments that he has ‘killed a love for whose each drop of blood / I would have pawned my heart’ (101–2), and in the following scene he boasts to his father that ‘nine months I lived / A happy monarch of her heart’ (5.6.44–5).

The two broad semantic fields into which the play’s figurative uses of the heart fall converge in the play’s Petrarchan discourse, employed mainly by Giovanni and Soranzo. The two discourses of Petrarchanism and exchange are ostensibly antithetical. Petrarchan discourse renders the exchange value of women figurative in an attempt to place the specific object of its discourse, the beloved, beyond exchange. After the Friar has blessed the banquet celebrating his marriage to Annabella in 4.1, for example, Soranzo declares that God — ‘the hand of goodness’ (7) — has ‘enriched my life / With this most precious jewel; such a prize / As earth hath not another like to this’ (11–13). Petrarchan discourse here sublimates the exchange economy in which Annabella is the commodity exchanged between Florio, Annabella’s earthly father, and Soranzo into a gift economy in which a transcendental Father has given to Soranzo a gift that transcends exchange value: the ‘earth hath not another like to’ Annabella, no other object of commensurate value with which she might be exchanged. Likewise, Giovanni seeks to remove Annabella from circulation as an object of exchange between men when he asserts, ‘I envy not the mightiest man alive, / But hold myself in being king of thee, / More

great, than were I king of all the world' (2.1.18–20), a trope he reworks in the play's final scene when he boasts of having been the 'happy monarch of her [Annabella's] heart' (5.6.45). But, as Giovanni informs Annabella, the exchange economy that underpins Petrarchan discourse is inescapable in its unsublimated form: 'I shall lose you, sweetheart' he tells her, for 'You must be married' (2.1.21, 23). Giovanni finds the rigour of this exigency ultimately intolerable. Although at the beginning of 5.3 he declares that 'the glory / Of two united hearts like hers and mine' (11–12) persists even though she is married to Soranzo, he is enraged and turned onto his path of revenge by Annabella's sincere repentance, which recognizes the claims of the marriage exchange upon her body if not her heart. The play makes it clear, moreover, that Soranzo 'owes' or owns Annabella's heart because Florio considers Soranzo to possess more economic and cultural capital than Annabella's other suitors. Indeed, in the scene immediately following the one in which he reassures Soranzo that he owns Annabella's heart, Florio does not hesitate to open the bidding up again when Donado offers to endow his nephew with 'Three thousand florins yearly during life, / And after I am dead, my whole estate' (1.3.17–18). 'Tis a fair proffer, sir', Florio responds, and 'your nephew / Shall have free passage to commence his suit' (19–20). The exchange economy is the precondition for Petrarchan discourse, the point from which it departs and the point to which it inevitably must return.

Until Giovanni enters with Annabella's heart on his dagger, Ford critics tend to agree, the play develops the heart primarily at the figurative level, as a textual or imaginary organ. Donald Anderson comments, representatively, that 'Ford's use of the heart and banquet imagery ... progresses from the figurative to the literal'.¹⁰ Anderson's linear narrative, however, disguises the complexity with which the play uses the heart figuratively as a kind of literate if not literal material. The play most clearly indicates the textual tissue out of which the heart as imaginary organ is composed by insistently returning to it as the material in which or on which signs are written. The concluding scene contains only the last of a number of dramatically striking moments in the play focusing on hearts as writing material. When in 1.2 Giovanni gives Annabella his dagger and commands her to 'strike home. / Rip up my bosom; there thou shalt behold / A heart, in which is writ the truth I speak' (199–201), he inaugurates a metaphor that others will take up at significant moments later in the play. As Soranzo drags the pregnant Annabella around the room in an attempt to tear from her the name of her child's father, for example, he counters her taunting refusal with the threat, 'I'll rip up thy

heart, / And find it there' (4.3.53–4). In these examples, the very materiality of the heart is figurative or imaginary.

The metaphor of heart as writing material generates a figurative fertility that finds its final wild flowering, however, in the play's final scene. The scene begins as the conventional climax of a revenge tragedy: the cuckolded husband Soranzo and his servant Vasques make last minute adjustments to the birthday banquet trap for the villain Giovanni. 'Remember, sir', Vasques tells his master, 'what you have to do; be wise and resolute' (5.6.1–2). In Soranzo's reply, the scene also tellingly offers another, very conventional, figuration of the heart: 'Enough, my heart is fixed' (2). As if the figurative heart and the sphere of meat to which the word ultimately, 'literally', belongs were separated by a stable semantic barrier which rendered each dead to the other, Soranzo then turns to one of his birthday banquet's guests, the Cardinal, and invites him to begin eating: 'Pleaseth your grace / To taste these coarse confections?' (3–4). Giovanni's entrance, of course, violently disrupts both the generic conventionality of the scene and the semantic conventionality of its opening dialogue. The former is essential to the latter: only by comically drawing out the cognitive dissonance of Soranzo and the other participants in the banquet can the scene both allow Giovanni his final extended attempt to write on Annabella's heart and establish the critical distance necessary to reveal that attempt to be a failure in spite of, or more precisely because of, its rhetorical intensity. Laurel Amtower observes that as Giovanni repeats himself to the feast's guests in his effort to persuade them that indeed it is Annabella's heart skewered on the end of his dagger, he recapitulates and extends the organ's symbolic significance, its textual tissue: 'Giovanni's emblematic wielding of Annabella's heart before him signals his identity as lover, commemorator, and avenger',¹¹ Amtower remarks. Such plays as John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* would have prepared Ford's audience to interpret Giovanni's entrance in emblematic terms, and Hippolyta's interruption of the wedding feast in 4.1 would have schooled the guests at this feast in the dramatic tradition of emblematic signalling. If he wishes to confront his onstage and offstage audiences with the real of Annabella's heart, then, Giovanni must counter the interpretive framework established by emblematic drama's conventional separation of the literal and figurative. To this end, Giovanni's figurations of the heart begin with the confusion of the semantically separate fields of meat and meaning:

You came to feast, my lords, with dainty fare.
I came to feast too, but I digged for food

In a much richer mine than gold or stone
 Of any value balanced; 'tis a heart,
 A heart, my lords, in which is mine entombed.
 Look well upon't; d'ee know't? (5.6.23–8)

The progression of Giovanni's metaphors is, however, telling: this scene quickly leaves behind the opening cannibalistic equation of Annabella's heart with food, an equation that draws the word back toward the sphere of its literal reference in meat, for the more Petrarchan metaphors of jewel and monument. The imaginary mine of Giovanni's digging replaces Annabella's opened body, and the hollow, inorganic monument of the lines' final figure replaces the warm, bleeding muscle that Giovanni has cut out from Annabella's body and is now dangling on his dagger's point. Denis Gauer argues that the heart in this scene 'emphasizes how artificial the link between the symbolic instances of Culture and the real ones of Nature actually is'.¹² Neill comments that 'the heart always threatens to become nothing more than itself, a grisly tautology — a piece of offal *en brochette*, brutally stripped of all vestiges of metaphor'.¹³ Strikingly, however, in this play the heart has great difficulty making good on that threat, on being nothing more than itself. Giovanni continues his flight from the literal until, in order finally to answer Vasques's textual question — 'What strange riddle's this?' (29) — he resorts to the demonstrative pronoun: 'These hands have from her bosom ripped *this* heart' (59, emphasis mine). Giovanni must at least momentarily abandon figurative language for such gestures as finger-pointing: this material lump, here, whose physical displacement Vasques verifies by empirical observation and induction when he leaves the stage presumably to view Annabella's empty body cavity and then returns to pronounce "'Tis most strangely true' (60).

Indeed, in this play the literal truth about female bodies is comic, stranger far than the figurative constructions of the female body. The literal, demonstrative truth is sustainable only momentarily. The play immediately reincorporates the obtrusion of the real, in the form of Annabella's heart, back into the semiotic and cultural tissue that constitutes reality. Vasques's pronouncement kills Florio, Annabella's father, leading the Cardinal to exclaim to Giovanni: 'Monster of children, see what thou has done, / Broke thy old father's heart!' (62–3). Florio may indeed die of a heart attack, but the truth of that awaits the coroner's inquest. At this point his heart, unlike his daughter's, remains concealed within his body. Its brokenness and the meanings that

issue from its fractures are entirely metaphorical. The language of the play has begun its movement back towards re-establishing the semantic boundaries between meat and meaning that prevailed at the opening of the scene. This movement progresses a few lines later, when Giovanni invokes his sister's heart once again right before stabbing Soranzo: 'Soranzo, see this heart which was thy wife's; / Thus I exchange it royally for thine, / [Stabs him] And thus, and thus; now brave revenge is mine' (72–4). Tropically, the bit of meat at the end of Giovanni's murder weapon functions as both synecdoche and bad pun. It synecdotally represents Annabella's sexualized body, the body of Soranzo's wife and Giovanni's sister lover. It functions as a bad pun by bringing together as a sign the two semantic fields of meat and meaning in a way that only emphasizes their disjunction. The stabbing parodies the key moment of non-incestuous patriarchal society, the exogamous exchange of a female body between men to consolidate their relationship. The female's male relative gives the female, gives her heart, to the man who is to be her husband, in exchange for the husband's heart, his affection. As imaginary organ, the heart in this exchange between Giovanni and Soranzo points towards exogamy and comedy; as organ at the end of the dagger it points to incest and tragedy. In this bifurcated organ, as W.W.E. Sights puts it, 'the horizontal structures of kinship and the vertical structures of power collide'.¹⁴ But only through the disjunction can Giovanni proclaim that 'brave revenge is mine'. His ripping up of Annabella's heart, his withdrawing it from the circuits of patriarchal exchange, and his emptying it of meaning can have meaning, the meaning of an act of revenge, only when her heart is a meaningful signifier within those circuits. Giovanni's extreme revenge must be a bad pun, the convergence without commingling of the heart as sign and the heart as matter.

The Cardinal's pronouncement and Giovanni's parody of the moment of patriarchal exchange of women work to contain the comic irruption of the real, an irruption that collapses the semantic distinctions upon which the figuration of female bodies as objects of exchange depends. Giovanni's own discourse on incest creates similar semantic confusion at the beginning of the play:

Shall a peevish sound,
A customary form, from man to man,
Of brother and of sister, be a bar
'Twixt my perpetual happiness and me?

Say that we had one father, say one womb
 (Curse to my joys) gave both us life and birth;
 Are we not therefore each to other bound
 So much the more by nature, by the links
 Of blood, of reason? nay, if you will have't
 Even of religion, to be ever one:
 One soul, one flesh, one love, one heart, one all? (1.1.24–35)

In Giovanni's discourse, incestuous nature at once undermines and perversely refigures culture's 'peevish sounds', its regimentation of bodies through signs such as brother and sister. The logic of the flesh and of the womb that characterizes incestuous nature in this discourse both renders the terms brother and sister irrelevant and suggests that they literally denote the relationship for which the terms husband and wife are merely metaphors: brother and sister are 'one flesh'. Significantly, however, Giovanni's speech is not comical but, rather, positions Giovanni's situation as tragic — 'Curse to my joys' — and even Giovanni's seemingly radical deconstruction of the binary opposition of nature and culture takes place safely within a patriarchal framework that maintains the distinction between man as cultural agent of exchange and woman as nature, bodies, and body parts: cultural forms are passed from 'man to man', and Giovanni and Annabella are brother and sister because they 'had one father' and 'one womb'. Although Giovanni opposes nature to culture, nature in this play is as semiotically coded as culture. More specifically, the sexualized and textualized female body is, in Butler's formulation, 'a discursive formation that acts as a naturalized foundation for the nature/culture distinction and the strategies of domination that that distinction supports. The binary relation between culture and nature promotes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely "imposes" meaning on nature, and, hence, renders it into an 'Other' to be appropriated for its own limitless uses'.¹⁵ Nature in general, and the reproductive female body that serves as its synecdoche in Giovanni's discourse here and throughout the play, function as imaginary back constructions of patriarchal culture, whose primary structure for the regulation of signs and sexuality, signs of sexuality, is the exchange of women between men.

In opposition to Giovanni's tragic construction of incest and to the mercantile and Petrarchan discourses through which the play's male characters code the female body, the play contains instances of a radical and comic discourse of the body and its pleasures, articulated primarily by its two main

comic characters, Bergetto, Annabella's idiot suitor (modelled perhaps on Jonson's Bartholomew Cokes in *Bartholomew Fair*), and Putana, Annabella's bawdy nurse (modelled perhaps on Shakespeare's nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*). In contrast to Annabella's two other suitors, Soranzo and Grimaldi, Bergetto is clearly and unabashedly a fool. More precisely, he fully intends to pursue his pleasures, and his pleasures include such carnivalesque delights as following up on his barber's news that 'there is a new fellow come to town, who undertakes to make mills go without the mortal help of any water or wind, only with sandbags: and this fellow hath a strange horse, a most excellent beast ... whose head, to the wonder of all Christian people, stands just behind where his tail is' (1.3.35–9). Such pleasures, crude though they seem, trump for Bergetto the more culturally sophisticated pleasure (or business) to which his uncle Donado would have him attend: wooing Annabella. 'Wilt thou be a fool still?' Donado exclaims upon hearing Bergetto's news, 'Come sir, you shall not go; you have more mind of a puppet-play, than on the business I told ye' (44–5). Bergetto does eventually take up the business, and the resulting comedy issues from the gap Bergetto's discourse exposes between the cultural coding of the female body and the raw material of desire. 'Most dainty and honey-sweet mistress', his love letter to Annabella begins; what follows, however, immediately undercuts this conventional Petrarchan address: 'I could call you fair, and lie as fast as any that loves you' (2.6.19–20). Bergetto is not the Shakespeare of sonnet 130, though. Having refused to belie his mistress with false compare, Bergetto gets right to the point: 'I am wise enough to tell you I can board where I see occasion, or if you like my uncle's wit better than mine, you shall marry me; if you like mine better than his, I will marry you in spite of your teeth' (22–5). Bergetto refuses the Petrarchan fetishization of the female body and desire. He also refuses its function of masking, or rendering figurative, the economic nature of the patriarchal exchange in women's bodies. 'I can have wenches enough in Parma for half-a-crown apiece' (2.6.105–6) is his reply to being informed by his uncle that his foolish talk and behaviour have had the result that 'you need not care for sending letters: now you are dismissed; your mistress here will none of you' (104–5). At this point in the play, Bergetto has found an alternative mistress anyway: Richardetto's niece Philotis, with whom he intends to 'beget a race of wise men and constables, that shall cart whores at their own charges and break the Duke's peace ere I have done myself' (3.1.20–2). Bergetto's comic fantasy of establishing a lineage of petty parochial officers who simultaneously enforce and break the law parodies the fantasies of the main suitors, such as

Soranzo, of establishing their own honourable blood through Annabella's reproductive body. Having discovered Annabella's pregnant state, Soranzo exclaims to Vasques, 'in this piece of flesh, / This faithless face of hers, had I laid up / The treasure of my heart!' (4.3.105–7). Now, however, 'Deceitful creature, / How hast thou mocked my hopes, and in the shame / Of thy lewd womb, even buried me alive' (110–12). These lines code the female body as receptacle for male patriarchal fantasy and nightmare: Annabella's face is the vault for Soranzo's affections and aspirations, and her womb is the tomb in which Soranzo dies without legitimate heir. The movement from face to womb is a movement downwards, but it is not a movement towards comedy or towards the real of the body: even in its misogyny, Soranzo's discourse of the female body renders it an imaginary body, its faithless and lewd nature wholly the product of patriarchal cultural codes. Bergetto's comic lineage implicitly critiques these fantasies and the imaginary female body on which they depend by mocking the activities by which patriarchal society attempts to institute these fantasies as 'reality': policing the female body and its sexuality, and competition amongst males for female bodies, lead them to 'break the Duke's peace' (3.1.22) in such displays as the confrontation between Grimaldi and Vasques with which 1.2 opens.

This display of male competition over female bodies provokes the carnivalesque discourse of the play's other major comic character, Putana. 'How like you this, child?', she remarks to Annabella after Vasques and Grimaldi have put up their swords, 'Here's threatening, challenging, quarrelling, and fighting, on every side, and all is for your sake; you had need look to yourself, charge, you'll be stol'n away sleeping else shortly' (1.2.61–4). Putana's excited description of the duelling focuses on its physical nature, its action; her later description of the combatants and other suitors is similarly focused on the physical, specifically on their bodies and their suitability to the satisfaction of female desire. She admits that Grimaldi is 'a Roman, nephew to the Duke Monferrato' (73–4), who 'did good service in the wars against the Milanese' (74–5), but she considers him unsuitable because he is a soldier and therefore, like almost all soldiers in her estimation, has 'some privy maim or other, that mars their standing upright' (77–8). Moreover, 'he crinkles so much in the hams; though he might serve if there were no more men, yet he's not the man I would choose' (78–80). She advises Annabella to 'Commend a man for his qualities, but take a husband as he is a plain-sufficient, naked man' (91–2). In a play like Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, the wounds and other bodily deformities incurred in war ennoble a man; for Putana, they

render him less than 'plain-sufficient'. Putana's carnivalesque discourse in this scene acknowledges such patriarchal values as noble blood and martial valour only to subvert them with a discourse of the physical body and its pleasures, specifically its ability to serve female pleasures. The subversiveness of Putana's discourse is even more apparent in her reaction to Annabella's incestuous relationship with Giovanni: 'What though he be your brother? Your brother's a man I hope, and I say still, if a young wench feel the fit upon her, let her take anybody, father or brother, all is one' (2.1.43–5). All is one: the names by which patriarchal society codes the system of familial relations that structure the exchange in women lose their distinction, their signifying difference, in the face of female desire. Ultimately, however, the play cannot countenance desire in such a raw form, desire that strips its coding in quest of mere flesh. The severity of Putana's punishment at the end of the play indicates the seriousness of the threat to patriarchy posed by indiscriminate, active female desire. Her eyes are put out, and the Cardinal commands that 'she be ta'en / Out of the city, for example's sake, / There to be burnt to ashes' (5.6.130–2). Beyond the grounds and walls of the city, beyond the orderly integration of nature and culture, Putana, a minor comic character, must be annihilated.

Richard McCabe has argued that in early modern English drama incest 'functions to unsettle established certainties and promote skeptical speculation'.¹⁶ But however unsettling Giovanni's atheism may be, the concluding scene's reinscription of the real of Annabella's heart and the destruction of Putana indicate the limits to this play's interrogation of incest. These limits are generic and cultural. With Putana and with the concluding scene, the play has risked comedy only to reaffirm incest as inexorably tragic. R.L. Smallwood contends that Ford's play is a darker reworking of *Romeo and Juliet* 'through a series of deliberate echoes and adaptations which darken the tone, cloud the moral issues, and deepen the sense of inescapable doom'.¹⁷ Ford's adaptations, however, go beyond simply giving a more somber and sensationalistic colouring to Shakespearean tragic conventions. Ford has radically reworked the relationship between comedy and tragedy that Shakespeare establishes in his play, which is often twinned with his comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. If *Romeo and Juliet* retains comic outcome as a structural possibility until the final moments, Ford precludes a comic outcome from the outset. Giovanni and Annabella cannot possibly overcome external obstacles, perhaps in the woods outside Parma, and return to the city to have their union blessed by society and by fairies. Giovanni himself

implies as much when he emerges from the bedroom with Annabella in 2.1 and tells her that 'You must be married, mistress' (22). Giovanni's atheism may interrogate the truth of Christian metaphysics, but it does not question the law of the Father. A comic outcome to the opening problem of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is, literally, unthinkable. Thematically, incest dominates the play, but it also indicates the limits to its generic experimentalism and its cultural skepticism. To countenance Putana's comic vision of 'all is one' would be to question the patriarchal socio-symbolic order, and the comic and tragic generic conventions built on them, at their very foundations, the exogamous exchange of women between men. The comedy of incest constitutes the play's tragic unconscious, emerging at moments as a bad joke or a bad pun to garner a nervous laugh, but repressed by the play's generic conventions and the cultural certitude underpinning them.

Notes

- 1 Ronald Huebert, *John Ford: Baroque English Dramatist* (Montreal, 1977), 37.
- 2 John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Other Plays*, ed. Marion Lomax (Oxford, 1995). All subsequent quotations from the play are from this edition and are parenthetically cited in the text.
- 3 Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 88.
- 4 Alan Dessen, 'A Fairy Tale and a Falling Library, a Bloody Ghost, and a Rabbit-Skinning: Shakespeare (and Ford) on Stage in 2009', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 27.4 (2009), 90.
- 5 Richard Madelaine, "'Sensationalism" and "Melodrama" in Ford's Plays', in *John Ford: Critical Re-Visions*, ed. Michael Neill (Cambridge, 1988), 33.
- 6 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology: I*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York, 1969), 1.
- 7 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), 39.
- 8 Michael Neill, "'What Strange Riddle's This?": Deciphering *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*', in *Revenge Tragedy*, ed. Stevie Simkin (Basingstoke, 2001), 156–7.
- 9 Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London, 1995), 64–9.
- 10 Donald Anderson, 'The Heart and the Banquet: Imagery in Ford's *'Tis Pity* and *The Broken Heart*', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 2.2 (1962), 209.

- 11 Laurel Amtower, “‘This Idol Thou Ador’st’: The Iconography of *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*”, *Papers on Language and Literature* 34.2 (1998), 197.
- 12 Denis Gauer, ‘Heart and Blood: Nature and Culture in *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*’, *Cahiers Elisabethains* 31 (1987), 55.
- 13 Neill, “‘What Strange Riddle’s This?’”, 165.
- 14 William W.E. Slights, *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 2008), 117.
- 15 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 37.
- 16 Richard McCabe, ‘*’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* and Incest’, in *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*, eds Garrett A. Sullivan, Patrick Cheney, and Andrew Hadfield (New York, 2006), 310.
- 17 R.L. Smallwood, ‘*’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* and *Romeo and Juliet*’, *Cahiers Elisabethains* 20 (1981), 49.