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‘Riddling Shift’: Confession, Speech, and Power in *Romeo and Juliet* and *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*

*This essay maps the complex intersubjective dynamics of confession as illuminated in William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, plays in which the ritual of shrift has a pivotal narrative and thematic role. The essay focuses on the friar characters and the office of shrift with which they were associated, and argues that Shakespeare and Ford draw on the durable cultural currency of auricular confession in post-Reformation England to ultimately disruptive ends, as characters consistently and increasingly reconfigure the intersubjective scripts of confession, using its conventions to draft new architectures of performative power.*

When Romeo and Friar Laurence first appear on-stage together in the second act of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the confidential bond they share is made immediately clear, both in the rhymed couplets that link their lines and in Friar Laurence’s ready familiarity with Romeo’s ongoing romantic woes. As Friar Laurence struggles to keep up with Romeo’s rhapsody of thwarted new love, he situates Romeo’s story, and by extension their exchange, in terms of his religious office, and more specifically, the confessional, saying, ‘Be plain, good son, and homely in thy drift. / Riddling confession finds but riddling shrift’ (2.2.55–6).¹ Romeo goes on to ‘confess’, or disclose, his love for Juliet, but not in a spirit of atonement — rather, he seeks to advance his own secular, romantic plot. While Friar Laurence frames their exchange in terms of the formal discourse of confession that characterizes his office, Romeo seeks a different sacrament — marriage. Romeo resituates both the power dynamics of confession, in which Friar Laurence might be presumed to possess more discursive power than the confessant, and the expected telos of the ritual by tying his disclosures to Friar Laurence’s promise of cooperation:

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When, and where, and how
 We met, we wooed, and made exchange of vow
 I'll tell thee as I pass; but this I pray
 That thou consent to marry us today. (2.2.61–4)

Romeo's promise of exhaustive disclosure hints at traditional norms privileging fullness in confession, but the admission is premised on the evasion of those norms — Romeo will disclose events, not express repentance for them.

This scene, and Friar Laurence's caution that 'riddling confession finds but riddling shrift', exemplify the malleable boundaries around the secular discourse of formal confession in post-Reformation England. This discourse both prescribes Friar Laurence's relationship with Romeo and shapes the slippages among modes of subjective authority at work in their embodiment of that relationship. Friar Laurence responds to Romeo's enigmatic hints within a discourse in which he has claim to authority, but he also gestures to the limitations of the ritual he invokes. His caution is a telling one: in fact, the play itself could be said to 'riddle shrift', in multiple senses of the term, demonstrating its puzzling intersubjective complexity and revealing the holes in its cultural logic. Auricular confession and the relationships inherent to it play a pivotal role in the plot, and characters invoke 'shrift' on numerous occasions, but the ritual itself is never seriously pursued; instead, its cultural framework emerges as a vehicle for social dislocation, rather than spiritual amelioration.

This interest in — and foreclosure of — the confessional emerges again in John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, first performed in 1633, some forty years after *Romeo and Juliet*. Critics have regularly noted the intertextual relationship between these two works, exploring the way in which Ford amplifies and remixes themes and scenarios from *Romeo and Juliet*.² This dynamic extends to Ford's treatment of the confessional: *'Tis Pity* features a recurrent bait and switch in its stagings of auricular confession. Three key scenes, including the one that opens the play, begin in the context of confession to Friar Bonaventura, but they all pick up immediately *after* it has apparently taken place, visually and thematically highlighting the importance of the ritual while withholding it from the audience. When Friar Bonaventura warns Giovanni, who has just confessed an incestuous desire for his sister, that 'heaven admits no jest' (1.1.4), he echoes his literary predecessor in situating himself as a doctrinal instructor.³ In the context of *'Tis Pity*'s fixation on secrecy, agency, and moral corrosion, however, this warning is a reminder to Giovanni and the audience that outside the proper context of

redemption, the very verbalization of incestuous desire is itself dangerous, rather than a precondition of salvation as per the logic of Catholic confession.

Consistently deferred and fragmented in these plays, the institution of auricular confession is deployed primarily for its symbolic social and narrative value, and the dramatic roles played by Friar Laurence and Friar Bonaventura are framed by the paradigms, rather than the efficacious practices, of confession. Analysis of these characters in relation to one another reveals the often competing semantic and social frameworks that shape inhabitations of the conventional roles of confessor and confessant as they are imagined on the early modern stage. The insistent blurring of spiritual authority and secular intersubjectivity illuminated in these characters' roles in their respective plots reveals the complexity — and importance — of the ritual of confession as a discursive zone of privilege, disclosure, audition, and covert agency that animates innumerable plots in post-Reformation England.

Friar Laurence's tendency to make plans on behalf of his wayward young charges, rather than hearing about them within the regulatory structure of his confessional office, underlies Gillian Woods's suggestion that 'confession enables the plot' of *Romeo and Juliet*.⁴ At the same time, however, confession's very power as fuel for the plot depends on the inefficacy of its regulatory aims. Ford engages more directly with issues of doctrine, but even as *'Tis Pity* enacts an almost obsessive interest in the spiritual and corporeal workings of confession, Friar Bonaventura and the office with which he is associated likewise figure as a means of moving the plot forward and of staging conflicts of authority, agency, and implication that make manifest a theatrical exploration of a mode of confession *not* associated with a predictable kind of transformative spiritual power. These plays conspicuously deploy the conventional scripts of ritual, at times to impious ends. In doing so, they reveal the ways in which the early modern stage simultaneously leverages and reimagines the space — both physical and discursive — of confession as one in which intersubjective power dynamics at once come into focus and refract as characters work to leverage the forms of agency associated with their various confessional subject positions.

Confession is, as Michel Foucault argues, inextricably linked to the process of self-making; it 'is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement', a ritual that 'produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it'. Confession's capacity to animate subjectivity requires the collaboration of multiple subjects. The verbal self-examination of confession takes place, as Foucault makes clear, 'within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence ... of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the

authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile'.⁵ Audition in confession is an agential act rather than passive receipt of information; as Jeremy Tambling puts it, 'an actor acts, a captor receives, but a confessor does not confess, but *hears* confession'. The presumed power of the confessor, derived from the doctrinal structures of the church (and in other criminal contexts, state), is foundational to his role in the cultural imaginary. While Tambling accordingly situates the confessor as being 'on the side of power', he goes on to suggest that 'some two-way flow of power seems possible'.⁶ Both parties to the confession have roles to play and distinct forms of discursive authority, and as these dynamics play out on the stage, they reveal currents of power that are deeply contingent and surprisingly unpredictable. These plays illuminate the extent to which the discursive power of the confessional is intersubjective — dependent on the interplay of agencies among confessor, confessant, and the demands of various secular authorities.

Peter Brooks writes of the allure of the confessional: 'If knowledge is power, knowledge of secrets — of that which is consciously held back from knowledge — is the supreme and vertiginous power, offering the confessor a particular kind of dominance'.⁷ In Brooks's formulation, dominance reflects not institutional power, but something more affective, and the allure of the presumptive secret and the thrill of disclosure work simultaneously on characters within the plays and on audiences. Brooks also hints at the capacity for hearing confession to shape the auditor as well as the speaker. Vacated of its promise of transformative spiritual efficacy, confession operates in these plays as inherently reciprocal, bound up in an interplay of performative agencies. This framework illuminates the possibilities for discursive agency embedded in confession's scripts, but it likewise emphasizes the vulnerabilities, as well as the power, associated with secrecy and disclosure. In *Romeo and Juliet* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, forms of dominance associated with the confessional extend beyond the spiritual and are animated variously by patriarchal authority and sexual desire, by rhetorical art and physical violence. The confessional here is not a zone of spiritual transformation, but is instead the residue of that ritual power that lends it its symbolic resonance. In the early modern theatrical imagination, this tension produces confession as a discursive framework in which authority — the ability to author oneself and one's plot — can be contested and staged, and through which one can probe the limits of subjective signification. The friar character emerges in both these plays as an emblem of a foreclosed spiritual and social authority, and in triangulating and mediating the fates of himself and others, he illuminates the dislocations of confessional agency associated with the sharing of secrets onstage.

The Friar Confessor

From the Middle Ages onward, the Catholic church mandated annual auricular confession — confession spoken in private to a priest or sanctioned religious figure for the purposes of penance and absolution. The sacrament was intended to heal the penitent spiritually; the 1215 ruling of the Fourth Lateran Council that established the requirement explicitly connects the confessor to the physician, saying: 'the priest shall be discerning and prudent, so that like a skilled doctor he may pour wine and oil over the wounds of the injured one'.⁸ The in-person exchange was also, however, intended to heal the social rupture of sin through the specifically interpersonal nature of the ritual of atonement and reconciliation as orchestrated by the confessant. The Reformation eliminated the confession requirement in the Church of England in part on the basis that humans lacked the power to offer absolution on behalf of God.⁹ Even after the institutional role of auricular confession was eliminated in England, the ritual maintained a persistent role in the cultural imaginary, emerging in Protestant critiques as a powerful symbol of the theological corruption of Catholicism, condemned for the inherent prurience of its insistence on the secret verbalization of sin.

Elizabethan authorities sought to limit the representation of Catholic symbols and rituals in post-Reformation theatrical representations, a move that reflects the currency such symbolism retained. As Andrew Sofer argues, 'the mass and its symbols did not fade from the awareness of early modern audiences once their overt representation was banned on the stage' and playwrights 'were eager to exploit the rituals of the old religion'.¹⁰ Paul D. Stegner describes the persistence of private confession on the early modern stage in terms of 'doctrinal simultaneity' wherein the traces of Catholicism 'coexist [with], trouble, and even threaten to undermine' the prevailing belief system.¹¹ In contrast to the emphasis on private reflection and prayer in Protestant penitential models, auricular confession requires audition, the speaking aloud of one's secrets, and given that, its persistent dramaturgical and thematic power for the stage is clear. Its association with a banished religion seems simultaneously to add to its dramatic appeal and call its conventional intersubjective scripts for penitence and absolution into suspicion.

Given post-Reformation politics, early modern playwrights usually evoked or referenced, rather than staged, the actual ritual of confession, avoiding the depiction of what would be seen as real, efficacious penance and absolution on the stage. One notable exception appears in Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624), in which the surprisingly sympathetic (given contemporary prejudices) Jesuit Francisco dons an elaborate liturgical vestment and offers absolution to the titular

renegade Grimaldi, saying ‘Tis forgiven. / I ... pronounce it. / I bring peace to thee: see that thou deserve it / In thy fair life hereafter’ (4.1.80–4).¹² The play is unusual in its focus on and open depiction of Catholic rituals, and editor Michael Neill ties this trait to timing; Massinger was writing at a moment in which James temporarily relaxed restrictions on the practice of Roman Catholicism.¹³ Massinger’s approach is an exception, rather than the rule, however. *Romeo and Juliet* and *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* are among a host of thematically related early modern dramas that make use of a Catholic setting — in these plays, Italy — that facilitates dramatic play with pre-Reformation practices rendered simultaneously familiar and exotic.¹⁴ The presence of Catholic characters allows playwrights to mine the dramatic potential of sacramental imperatives, as illustrated near the climax of Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (ca 1612), when Cariola pleads to her murderers, ‘if you kill me now / I am damned. I have not been at confession / This two years’ (4.2.243–5).¹⁵ Cariola’s plea registers in light of a conventional gendering of confession that associates femininity with performances of piety and indicates that the salvific power associated with confession remains legible. Notably, however, the confessional obligation is manifested in terms of its lack: Cariola raises the point in reference to her lapses. Webster, Shakespeare, and Ford all illustrate how the confessional operates as a source of dramatic rather than salvific power, a dynamic animated by their tendency to focus on its failures and limitations.

As a device for advancing plot and characterization, confession was closely tied to the figure of the friar, which was in and of itself a lively literary type and a broad cultural signifier throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Friars may have been banned from England in the 1530s, ‘but they continued to populate the nation’s plays’ in the century to follow.¹⁶ In popular pamphlets and literary texts alike, friars come to serve as an easy emblem for anti-Catholic suspicion and critique — take, for instance, Mephistopheles appearing to Faustus in the guise of a friar in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1592). Friars tended to be depicted as either comically ineffectual, bawdy and lascivious, or figures of ‘pretense, disguise, and deceit’.¹⁷ Fraternal orders were long associated with the sacrament of confession, and the power, secrecy, and suspicion with which the ritual was associated shaped the friar’s role in the cultural imaginary. Such depictions of friars expose anxiety that the auditory power of the confessor coupled with the confidentiality of the office stood, as Martin Wiggins argues, ‘to make them accessories, albeit perhaps unwillingly, in all manner of crime and immorality that could be restrained or punished if it were only known about’.¹⁸ Beyond providing cover for complicity, the secrecy of the confessional could also be associated with covert forms of agency.

Anti-fraternal sentiment is clearly evident in Arthur Brooke's 1562 narrative poem, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, an immediate source for Shakespeare's play. Brooke's poem, in keeping with its source texts, tends toward a morally ambiguous depiction of the Friar.¹⁹ In his preface, however, Brooke is explicit in connecting the Friar to moral corruption at the heart of the lovers' tragedy. Brooke condemns Romeo and Juliet for:

neglecting the authoritie and advise of parents and frendes, conferring their principall counsels with dronken gossypes, and superstitious friers (the naturally fitte instrumentes of unchastitie) [and for] using auricular confession (the key of whore-dome, and treason) for furtheraunce of theyr purpose.²⁰

Brooke's suspicion of auricular confession as a form of dangerous fraternal agency is distinct from conventional Protestant critique: he condemns the Friar as 'principall counsel' to the lovers, along with the nurse, because he supplants the rightful supremacy of the 'authoritie and advice of parents'. In equating disclosure to the Friar with 'drunken gossip', Brooke reflects the contests for narrative and moral authority that underlie the still-legible cultural privilege associated with confession within the tale.

Against a cultural context that troubles the capacity of a single subject to embody divine confessional agency, Friar Laurence in Shakespeare's play acts as a semi-secular version of council cloaked in spiritual authority. At the same time, however, Friar Laurence's intervention in the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* reflects the tendency in early modern depictions of friar-confessors to highlight their potential misuse for deceit and moral corruption. Critical interpretations of Friar Laurence are notably variable. While a critical commonplace in twentieth-century criticism of the play emphasized Friar Laurence's wisdom, moderation, and integrity — in James C. Bryant's words, his 'fundamental beneficence'²¹ — recent decades have brought increased attention both to the character's manipulations and his comic inefficacy.²² In contrast to critics who condemn Friar Laurence for his role in the tragedy, Sarah Beckwith has characterized the friars of Shakespeare's early plays as figures who 'benignly circumvent the problems of paternal authority ... above all, they are not busy manipulators, but trusters of time'.²³ Beckwith articulates here Shakespeare's distance from the anti-fraternal tradition, and indeed, Friar Laurence is almost conspicuous in the benignity ascribed to him by characters in the otherwise fraught social landscape of the play. Nonetheless, insofar as he is a 'truster of time', that trust proves disastrous to Romeo and Juliet precisely because of his failed machinations. Friar Laurence's manipulations of the plot are

integral both to his narrative role and to the evolution of the confessorial office as he embodies it. His meddling, his counsel, his plans, and his failures together help illustrate how the confessional retains a culturally legible sanctity constant tension with the limitations of its efficacy.

‘Myself Condemnèd and Myself Excused’

In adapting Brooke’s ‘superstitious frier’, Shakespeare probes the persistent power of the rhetoric and ritual of confession while complicating the condemnation of Friar Laurence’s mode of agency. When Romeo calls Friar Laurence ‘a divine, a ghostly confessor, / A sin absolver, and my friend professed’ (3.3.50–1), the line reveals the intersecting and contradictory strains of their relationship. Friar Laurence is multiply interpellated in the world of the play — he is subject to the coexisting demands of social and spiritual realms, an interplay that simultaneously shapes and constrains his agency.²⁴ When critics refer to Friar Laurence as an ‘agent’ of the young protagonists, it reflects his ready willingness to help them defy parental edicts, his admonition to act ‘wisely and slow’ notwithstanding (2.3.94).²⁵ Romeo and Juliet tend to rhetorically position Friar Laurence not as a confessor working to salve transgression but as a co-conspirator bound to keep their confidence, and he responds accordingly. Though Friar Laurence acts on behalf of the lovers, he also demonstrates an authorial agency in the plot of the play that extends beyond his religious office to a private — if public-spirited — agenda of his own, aiming to transform the ‘households’ rancor to pure love’ through his machinations (2.4.92). Shakespeare’s Friar Laurence may have an agenda, but his apparent motivation differs markedly from that described in the Brooke version. Far from being a proponent of unchastity, Friar Laurence demonstrates an active support for and commitment to the chastity of marriage and the stability of the community. As the latter seems to crumble, Juliet herself questions his motives, asking herself if the potion Friar Laurence has provided could be poison, given ‘lest in this marriage he should be dishonored / Because he married me before to Romeo?’ (25–6). She exonerates him as one who has ‘still been tried a holy man’ (4.3.28), but her question reflects a serious anxiety about forms of agency that exceed the conventional authority of the fraternal office.

Romeo and Juliet refutes Friar Laurence’s cell as a site of ritualized, atonement-oriented confession, but the Friar’s role as ‘father-confessor’ remains integral to the unfolding of the plot. Rachel Prusko evokes the Foucauldian framework of confession to suggest that ‘Romeo and Juliet begin to constitute themselves as subjects within the privacy of Friar Laurence’s cell; private “confession,” uttered

in the secret space of the cell, helps the teens perceive themselves as individuals'. If this statement is true, it is precisely because of the extent to which the pair leverage the cultural authority of confession while resisting its ritual prescriptions,²⁶ particularly Juliet, whose gender and age bring with them strong expectations for performances of pious femininity alongside patriarchal submission.²⁷ Friar Laurence's cell is accordingly the only socially sanctioned space available to both Romeo and Juliet. Shakespeare underscores the irony of this privilege by repeatedly connecting the space of shrift and the subversion of domestic authority, as we see when Juliet bids the nurse tell her mother, 'having displeased my father, to Laurence' cell / To make confession and be absolved' (3.5.234–5). The causal link implied by her statement neatly frames what seems to be a socially unimpeachable cover story made all the more urgent by the connection she traces between the theoretically interlocking ideological systems of her father's patriarchal authority and Friar Laurence's (or 'ghostly father's') spiritual authority.²⁸

Juliet's elision of earthly and heavenly fathers reflects the metonymic association between individual shrift and social reconciliation, but the play challenges this linkage, positing the ritual of shrift as a cover story to facilitate the kind of extra-parental license that Brooke's prologue condemned. As the audience has good reason to suspect, Juliet has no plans to confess in obeisance to either figure, a refutation of fatherly authority that encompasses the domestic and spiritual realms. This dynamic extends to Juliet's handling of Paris, whom she has reason to view as an avatar of patriarchal might. He intercepts her as she goes to Friar Laurence's cell in the wake of Romeo's banishment:

PARIS Come you to make confession to this father?

JULIET To answer that I should confess to you.

PARIS Do not deny to him that you love me.

JULIET I will confess to you that I love him. (4.1.22–6)

Juliet's wordplay here substitutes the love associated with spiritual devotion for that of romantic devotion. Though Paris ultimately defers to the seal of the confessional that both Juliet and Friar Laurence invoke, his flirtatious attempt to prescribe Juliet's confession reflects a sustained contest for subjective authority triangulated through Friar Laurence and challenged by the private space of the confessional.

The strategic utilization of confession present in *Romeo and Juliet* suggests a suspicion commonly voiced in post-Reformation literature: that the duplicity associated with auricular confession extends from religious figures to the

confessants themselves. This anxiety reflects the conceptions of subjectivity and interiority that early modern writers were exploring; as Katherine Maus argues, if early modern subjectivity can be defined in part by this imagined relationship between one's sense of personal inwardness and outwardness, the latter realm is distinguished as 'misleading' and 'falsifiable'.²⁹ *Romeo and Juliet* depicts the lovers' duplicity relatively sympathetically in terms of the narrative telos of tragic love, but while the lovers themselves embrace the idea of real love at first sight, their plots with Friar Laurence depend on their capacity to feign affect, as when he advises Juliet to 'Go home, be merry, give consent / To marry Paris' (4.1.89–90). In an example of rather humorously on-the-nose dialogue, the nurse heralds her entrance in the next scene with the observation: 'See where she comes from shrift with a merry look', underscoring Juliet's performance of obedient femininity in an exchange rife with dramatic irony (4.2.14). Juliet ties her apparent change of attitude directly to having undergone confession with Friar Laurence, where she has learnt 'to repent the sin / Of disobedient opposition' (17–18). In its focus on how Juliet navigates the expectations of confessional piety in secular spaces, the play reflects the gendered cultural dynamics of confession, while also representing her as a character with substantial performative agency.

When *Romeo and Juliet*'s final tragedy unfolds, Friar Laurence's privileged role in their plots puts him in the new position of one charged with revealing, rather than keeping, secrets. In his last major speech, he recounts the events that led up to the lovers' deaths for the shocked families onstage (5.3.229–69). Within the plot, this speech makes sense: the surviving characters onstage are missing critical information needed to bring the play to the conclusion promised in the prologue. As Jill Levenson has argued, however, Friar Laurence is a skilled orator whose speeches tend to be situated in contexts that ironize them and undercut their effects.³⁰ Indeed, scholars of the play have critiqued the speech for its length — despite his promise of brevity, Friar Laurence goes on for thirty lines — and redundancy, since it offers no new information for the audience.³¹ The apparent redundancy of the speech registers differently, however, if we view it in the context of confession, a verbal rehearsal that gives ritual shape and discursive authority to acts of telling and listening. In the wake of the lovers' deaths, Friar Laurence is *explaining* to his onstage audience from his position of privileged knowledge, but he is also *confessing* his active role in the tragedy. As a confessional speech, this one is unique in a play that tends to reference confession only to foreclose it. It illustrates the narrative and thematic logic of confession as a public, social, and performative ritual on the early modern stage, in which public confession is an ameliorative narrative telos. Further, in being delivered by the 'ghostly confessor'

himself, this speech stands in striking contrast to the secrecy and privacy associated with the ritual with which he is associated.

Friar Laurence's account includes a litany of first-person actions, both descriptive and performative: he admits, for example, 'I married them', 'gave I her ... A sleeping potion', 'I writ to Romeo', 'All alone ... Came I to take her', and 'I entreated her come forth'. This pattern underscores his culpability in the plot, and as Emily C. Bartels points out, Friar Laurence's wordy self-defense itself raises the possibility that he could or should be punished for his actions.³² Friar Laurence seems to leave open the possibility of his guilt by posing it in conditional terms as he concludes, leaving to his auditors to determine 'if aught in this / Miscarried by [his] fault' (5.3.266–7). At stake in this 'if' is the role presumed to be played by the office of the confessor itself and the forms of spiritual *and* social responsibility with which that office is associated. While Friar Laurence himself equivocates on the matter of his guilt, in raising the point in this way, he draws attention to the notion, hinted at throughout the play, that the judgments and absolutions associated with shrift are performative and unstable. In publicizing the secrets of the dead lovers, Friar Laurence goes against the expectation of confidentiality associated with his office within the plot and reminds the audience of its privileged diegetic knowledge. As a public confessant, Friar Laurence exposes the stakes of his agential role in the lovers' secret plots, and reveals the slippages between confidant and co-conspirator that have emerged over the course of the play.

The speech itself is framed by another expression of agency that further calls attention to Friar Laurence's conflicting approaches to confessional subjectivity. As he begins the speech, he announces that he stands, 'both to impeach and purge, / Myself condemnèd and myself excused' (225–6). The implied temporal and causal configuration of these lines indicates that Friar Laurence has already acted, in essence, as his own confessor, and having done so submits to the secular authority of his auditors. The matter of guilt signifies in terms of contrition as well as culpability, and Friar Laurence largely elides the question of the former from his account. While critics have debated the question of whether Friar Laurence is expressing a personal sense of guilt, the play itself does not dwell on his contrition or lack thereof.³³ In this, Shakespeare departs from Brooke, whose friar makes a lengthy and emotional plea for mercy.³⁴ Continuing the secular inversion of ritual confession, the Prince, rather than Friar Laurence, offers a version of onstage absolution when he responds with the assurance, 'we still have known thee for a holy man' (270). In assuming the authority to hear and pardon, the Prince retroactively reinforces the confessional nature of Friar Laurence's speech,

but his judgment hinges not on substance of his deeds or his moral failings, but rather on a spiritual reputation lodged in past tense.

The Prince's words recall Juliet's self-reassurance in the previous act, that Friar Laurence 'hath still been tried a holy man' (4.3.29). Juliet's doubts about Friar Laurence in that scene reflected anxiety about his capacity for agency irreducible to his office and potentially at odds with his outward performances. Juliet's fear and self-reassurance proleptically identify Friar Laurence's place at the end of the play — he is always 'still' a holy man, a turn of phrase that underscores its own contingency. Friar Laurence's role within the play up to the point of his final speech suggests an understanding of the ritual of confession as a largely empty signifier, constantly deferred and displaced from the paradigm of an efficacious penitence and spiritually transformative effects. In announcing and privileging his capacity to 'excuse' himself for the failures of his confessional role, *Romeo and Juliet's* Friar Laurence spotlights the persistent discursive power of his symbolic role, while simultaneously illustrating its instabilities and limitations.

'I May Not Hear It'

If in *Romeo and Juliet*, shrift is frequently invoked but never seriously pursued, in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, confession is pursued and explored obsessively, functioning as a primary motif in the play. *'Tis Pity*, like the earlier play, depicts a doomed love affair, but Ford shifts his focus from lovers thwarted by warring families to attraction within a family, between siblings Giovanni and Annabella. The spectre of incest jointly titillates and horrifies throughout the play, raising the stakes of culpability for the lovers and their confessor alike. Even more so than *Romeo and Juliet*, a play it self-consciously parallels, *'Tis Pity* probes the subjective terrain of auricular confession — both in terms of verbal performativity and through its exploration of the nature of repentance. Three pivotal scenes, including the one that opens the play, take place in Friar Bonaventura's cell, immediately *after* shrift has taken place. Ford strategically highlights the importance of confession while concealing its substance from the audience, replicating in them the desire for access to that which is hidden in others that governs the characters on stage. By pairing the traditional signifiers of confessional disclosure with violent, impossible attempts to wrest secrets from others, *'Tis Pity* amplifies stakes of the play's contests for confessional and narrative authority. In the play's emphasis on the limitations of confession, expressed in its depictions of the inefficacy of the ritual and the unintelligibility of the subject, *'Tis Pity* locates dramatic power in the evacuation of the cultural emblem of shrift that it repeatedly conjures.

Bartels argues that the intertextuality of Ford's play 'draws attention to the inscrutability of drama and the tenuousness of its terms', and in doing so, 'inevitably changes the context through which we come to the prior text'.³⁵ This reciprocity, rather than a desire to chart a straightforward chronological cultural arc, informs my juxtaposition of these plays. Woods has explored how the play stages the doctrinally complex 'sacramental struggle', but again, the ritual ultimately functions in the play as a social and dramatic rather than religious construct.³⁶ Though the formal patterns of ritual are prominent in the play, they don't or can't work according to its norms — Ford's structure insistently withholds efficacious shrift, and the ironized authority Shakespeare vested in his friar here gives way to more explicit dismissal. By the end of the play, Friar Bonaventura's agential capacity is fully circumscribed by his knowledge and position; he knows too much that he cannot fix and cannot tell, and in Ford's violent and unpredictable theatrical world, he cannot trust, as Shakespeare's Friar Laurence evidently can, in his own authority to absolve.

The history between Giovanni and Friar Bonaventura mirrors that between Romeo and Friar Laurence: the first scene in the play establishes the close, trusting relationship between the pupil and his 'gentle father' (*'Tis Pity*, 1.1.12), and like Romeo, Giovanni tends to leverage that closeness in an attempt to alter the conventional dynamics and outcomes of shrift. The tone of Bonaventura's responses, however, has a different quality of horror and urgency when compared to that of his literary precursor, largely because of the magnitude of the mortal sin of incest to which Friar Bonaventura is made privy. The play begins immediately after Giovanni has first disclosed his desire, and the audience, entering into the exchange belatedly, must decipher the substance of Giovanni's frustration and Friar Bonaventura's horror. His first lines seem to position him as a rather contradictory confessor: he is admonishing Giovanni to stop speaking, saying, 'Dispute no more in this, for know, young man, / These are no school-points' (1.1.1–2). This line, however, is a critique of Giovanni's *mode* of speech, rather than speech itself. Giovanni's rhetorical approach, as numerous critics have identified, is that of an intellectual exercise in academic disputation rather than reflective confession.³⁷ Friar Bonaventura's response is on one hand intended to guide his pupil to repentance rather than justification, but on the other hand it brackets Giovanni's desires in the realm of the hypothetical disputation or 'jest' as a response to the joint spiritual and secular danger associated with voicing them.

The pattern of omissions in *'Tis Pity's* depiction of shrift emphasizes the auditor rather than the confessant, but it does so in a way that works decidedly against Tambling's supposition that to hear confession is to be 'on the side of power'.³⁸

Rather, Friar Bonaventura repeatedly reminds us of the vulnerability associated with audition and the threateningly penetrative quality of speech. By the end of his first speech, Friar Bonaventura goes so far as to reject audition altogether, saying, 'I may not hear it' (1.1.12). This dynamic recurs in the next confession scene, which once again picks up belatedly, with Giovanni having just disclosed that he and his sister have entered a sexual relationship. The scene opens with Friar Bonaventura's reaction:

Thou hast told a tale whose every word
Threatens eternal slaughter to the soul;
I'm sorry I have heard it. Would my ears
Had been one minute deaf before the hour
That thou camest to me!

(2.5.1–5)

Friar Bonaventura's lines fail to distinguish clearly whether the threat manifested in Giovanni's utterance is to the soul of the speaker or the listener. Though the logic of auricular confession clearly places the emphasis on the confessant's soul, Friar Bonaventura's lines emphasize his role as the subject, the 'I' of an act of audition for which he is culpable. Friar Bonaventura is a captive audience; his agency is circumscribed by the privacy associated with his office. He has no recourse to purge himself of what he knows, and his affective response suggests a visceral horror that emphasizes the gravity of Giovanni's narrative. A pattern emerges in their exchanges: Giovanni expresses a sinful intransigence that leads Friar Bonaventura to abdicate spiritual responsibility only to try once again to intervene, imploring, 'Yet hear my counsel' and, later, 'Yet let me counsel thee' (1.2.68, 2.5.39). Ford's confessor is at once persistent and equivocal, and the play establishes the ritual of confession as cyclically ongoing and deferred. Enmeshed in this pattern, Friar Bonaventura's prescriptions of penitence for Giovanni are clearly futile, and the play's emphasis on the confessor's subjective reactions suggests that these exhortations are for him, rather than the sinner. Friar Bonaventura's evocations of the ritual ultimately reflect his limited capacity as confessor to contain or resolve the desires that it prompts to be spoken.

Whereas Friar Laurence's privileged information makes him a central figure of reconciliation at the end of Shakespeare's play, in Ford's, it appears that the relationship between knowledge and complicity has grown so unstable that Friar Bonaventura cannot take surety in the status of 'holy man' as could Friar Laurence. *'Tis Pity* demonstrates a deeper and more persistent anti-Catholic bent than did *Romeo and Juliet*, evident not just in Friar Bonaventura's inadequacies as a bulwark of moral authority, but even more so in the character of the Cardinal,

murderous and hopelessly corrupt. Even though Friar Laurence stages his own self-shriving in a secular context, he still has access to a spiritual discursive authority that affords him that performative power. Friar Bonaventura, in contrast, is laden with secrets that cannot, within the symbolic economies of the play, be expiated. He leaves Giovanni to his fate, and as the play moves toward its gory conclusion, Friar Bonaventura flees to Bologna to 'shun [the] coming blow' (5.3.67). The structural emphasis on Friar Bonaventura as auditor in *'Tis Pity* is ultimately animated not by his spiritual efficacy or authority, but rather by his secular vulnerability. Friar Bonaventura reflects anxiety about the power of illicit knowledge associated with the confessional and shows that power's limitations, particularly when the holy man is viewed as a subject shaped by social, as well as spiritual, pressure. *'Tis Pity's* obsessive interest in the space of the confessional reveals it to be more a trap, ensnaring its participants into a dangerous interplay, than a refuge; the seal of the confessional can protect neither the confessant nor the confessor.

'What Strange Riddle's This?'

Friar Bonaventura's palpable anxiety reflects the pervasive sense of menace, both corporeal and moral, that shapes the world of *'Tis Pity*. This atmosphere informs the play's preoccupation with the power dynamics occurring in the transmission of secrets, which Ford imagines in both verbal and somatic terms: body and soul alike are implicated in demands for full disclosure. Subjects in power repeatedly literalize the metaphors of interiority, threatening physical violence to compensate for the inaccessibility of others' subjectivities; the confessing subject here is very much a confessing body, and Ford underscores the vulnerability of both. In this, Ford evokes confession less in the terms of religious shrift, than in the terms of juridical torture, described by Foucault as a 'political technology of the body' rooted in 'power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subordinate them by turning them into objects of knowledge'.³⁹ As Brooks notes, understatedly, 'compelling the confession of belief, of inward thoughts or convictions, has always posed a problem'; while physical threat can inspire confessions whose narratives satisfy the demands of official or public narratives, subjective truth is inevitably more elusive, and that *'Tis Pity* is suffused by that anxiety as well.⁴⁰

The high stakes of the contests for discursive authority that animate *'Tis Pity's* treatment of confession most clearly coalesce around Annabella and the efforts of male figures — both lovers (Giovanni, Soranzo) and fathers real or spiritual (Friar Bonaventura, her father, Florio) — to control the way she interprets and is

interpreted by others. *'Tis Pity's* fixation on Annabella as an eroticized, female-gendered confessing subject reinforces both the competing power structures that shape confessional intersubjectivity and the limitations of that power: Annabella ultimately evades ready signification in the face of aggressive attempts to elicit and leverage the secrets of her interiority, here imagined both rhetorically and somatically. Ford, like Shakespeare, plays with the conventional scripts of confession to interrogate the dynamic forms of agency that those scripts might enable. In its bloody climax, however, Ford's play also reveals a preoccupation with the vacuum — of agency and of meaning alike — that it finds at the heart of a ritual that retains social currency but lacks efficacy and authority.

As with Juliet, Annabella's construction as a confessant is governed by her gender, age, and class: her status as a daughter of marriageable age likewise physically and socially constrains her. Giovanni is akin to his counterpart, Romeo, in enjoying far greater subjective autonomy than does his lover, but unlike Romeo, Giovanni is deliberate and aggressive about leveraging that structural imbalance in his romantic relationship. In Giovanni's first scene with Annabella, he manipulatively invokes Friar Bonaventura's authority to justify their romantic relationship, reinforcing the triangulation among these characters that shapes the plot even in Friar Bonaventura's absence. Though the Friar condemned incest in the previous scene, Giovanni falsely tells his sister, 'I have asked council of the holy Church / Who tells me I may love you' (1.2.236–7). Friar Bonaventura later implicitly reinforces Giovanni's subjective authority over his sister, even as Friar Bonaventura pursues what appears to be a legitimate concern for her salvation. Learning that the siblings have consummated their relationship, he pleads to Giovanni: 'Give me / Leave to shrive her, lest she should die unabsolved' (2.5.43–4). Giovanni's response to Friar Bonaventura posits confession as an erotic exercise in which Annabella's sexualized body will reveal its desire part by part in a twisted kind of blazon.⁴¹ Giovanni's assumption of authority over his sister's confessional performativity manifests an aggressive attempt at intersubjective control that defies Friar Bonaventura's own forms of discursive power. By conjuring Annabella's gendered body as a text available for interpretation, Giovanni highlights a tension that recurs throughout the play between the body's capacity to 'confess' interiority and the contingencies and limitations of the body's legibility.⁴²

Friar Bonaventura likewise constructs Annabella's confessional subjectivity in corporeal terms, though not with the lasciviousness suggested in Giovanni's imagined encounter. In contrast to her brother/lover, Annabella appears to be a model confessant when she appears in Friar Bonaventura's cell midway through the play — though the audience doesn't hear her confession, when the scene

begins immediately afterward Annabella seems to embody cooperative deference to the ritual, kneeling and weeping, and her few lines suggest sorrow and submission. Friar Bonaventura's responses emphasize the physical dimensions of her penitence: the sensory horrors of the hell that await the sinner, the spiritually salubrious effects of her tears, and the 'motions' he sees working in her heart (3.6.32). Friar Bonaventura leverages her penitence to secure a marriage between the now-pregnant Annabella and Soranzo for 'honour's safety' (36), reflecting an assumption of authority, like that of Friar Laurence, that is socially rather than necessarily spiritually minded. The apparent 'success', in Friar Bonaventura's eyes, of Annabella's shrift is undercut, however, in the following act, when Annabella reacts to Soranzo's fury about the affair with defiance, ironizing Friar Bonaventura's emphasis on the outward signs of penitence.

In Annabella's performance of shrift in Friar Bonaventura cell, and throughout the play, the embodied dynamics of confession exemplify what Neill has described as an early modern discourse of interiority represented corporeally, one that reveals insistent 'anxiety about the maddening opacity of the human body'.⁴³ That opacity appears particularly maddening to male characters assessing Annabella's female body, a dynamic explored in more depth by Mathew R. Martin, who illuminates the 'disjunction between imaginary and real female bodies' in the play.⁴⁴ Ford's play repeatedly posits the spectacle of female flesh as a kind of stand-in for intelligible meaning-making while at the same time consistently depicting that flesh as fragmentary — as in Giovanni's repeated blazoning of Annabella (1.2, 2.5) — and/or penetrable, as when Soranzo, Annabella's husband, violently interrogates her about her pregnancy in 4.3. By that point in the play, the pregnancy itself is evidently obvious; Annabella calls that question 'superfluous', ironically admitting 'I confess I am' (27). When Annabella proves unwilling to disclose that which is not already apparent on her body, specifically the identity of the unborn child's father, Soranzo turns his corporeal investigation inward threatening to 'rip up [her] heart / And find it there' (54–5). By imagining Annabella's secrets to be legible on and in her flesh, the men in her life violently render her confessional subjectivity in corporeal terms that elide her own discursive agency.

This dynamic stands in marked contrast to that which emerges in the beginning of act 5, when Annabella appears alone on the balcony to deliver her only soliloquy in the play. Holding a letter written in blood, she gives voice to her inner conflict, saying 'My conscience now stands up against my lust / With depositions characterized in guilt' (5.1.9–10). The legal metaphor with which Annabella frames her speech signifies in tandem with a religious context that emerges in the scene of her utterance: just as Annabella announces 'now I confess' (11), Friar Bonaventura

appears onstage, as though conjured by the words. In what follows, Annabella does not recognize that she is being overheard: Friar Bonaventura himself tells her it is a 'free confession 'twixt your peace and you' (42). He evokes the private inwardness associated with Protestant confession rather than the intersubjective ritual of the Catholic paradigm. And yet, by placing Friar Bonaventura on stage and situating him as an auditor and responder, Ford inevitably connects the scene to the symbolic structures of sacramental shrift, reflecting a 'doctrinal simultaneity' in which the still-familiar symbols and structures of Catholicism find an uneasy coexistence with a Protestant cultural setting.⁴⁵ Friar Bonaventura assumes the power to intercede on Annabella's behalf spiritually, a role that the play has undercut through its repeated depictions of incomplete shrift. Annabella, however, seeks an alternative intersubjective script, positioning Friar Bonaventura as a secular agent of her confession rather than as her confessor, charging him with carrying her letter to Giovanni — a letter in which she must, ironically, confess her repentance to her wholly unrepentant lover/brother. This letter, 'double lined in tears and blood' (35), is simultaneously tangible and obscure — the audience understands its symbolic value while the specific content of its text is withheld.⁴⁶

The bloody text of Annabella's missive of repentance stands in tension with the infamously gory spectacle of her dismembered heart that marks the play's final scene: Giovanni, having killed his sister, brandishes the organ to an uncomprehending audience, asking, 'd'ee [do you] know't?' The answer, of course, is no — as Vasques replies, 'What strange riddle's this?' (5.6.28–9). As Martin notes, this moment of grotesque (and, Martin argues, potentially comic) horror 'confront[s] the audience with the disjunction between imaginary and the real female bodies', suggesting that in this final scene, Annabella's heart lacks the semiotic coding that would make it intelligible.⁴⁷ By literalizing the trope of the body inscribed by interiority, Ford reveals its inherent incomprehensibility. The 'riddle' invites puzzling; it posits a potential solution, but the play steadfastly refuses to offer it, emphasizing instead the impossibility of meaningful self-expression or socially or spiritually efficacious ritual. The play's intertextual connection to *Romeo and Juliet* only serves to reinforce *'Tis Pity's* interest in discursive power and incomprehensibility. Whereas in Shakespeare's play, Friar Laurence's lengthy diegesis serves to demystify tragedy, in *'Tis Pity*, explanation seems literally unspeakable, and not just because of the taboo of incest at the centre of the drama. With the play's final lines, Ford ironizes attempts to retroactively impose moral narrative on tragedy: the iniquitous Cardinal gratuitously orders Annabella's female companion to be burned and offers a cynical quip that seems to willfully misunderstand the lessons

of the play: 'Of one so young, so rich in Nature's store, / Who could not say, 'Tis pity she's a whore' (158–9).

Friar Bonaventura's absence from the play's final scene helps underscore its cynicism and horror, all the more so when the character is read in relation to Friar Laurence. While neither friar character proves efficacious in terms of the formal ritual of shrift, in Ford's play, the contests for discursive power that emerge in relation to the confessional are charged to a new degree. Having (over)heard Annabella's confession in the play's final act, Friar Bonaventura confronts Giovanni with her letter, which the latter rejects as a product of Friar Bonaventura's 'religion maske'd sorceries' (5.3.29). Defiantly unrepentant, Giovanni claims the letter is but the 'peevisch chattering' of a 'weak old man' (40). This is not true, of course — Annabella has clearly come to her repentance and warning on her own terms, but the accusation is of a piece with the misogynist presumption running through the play that men are authors of female confessional subjectivity. In attributing one kind of discursive power to Friar Bonaventura, Giovanni undermines another; in his unrepentant excoriation, he echoes the Protestant condemnation of auricular confession as hollow and unholy theater. Giovanni's critique isn't fair, necessarily, but it reflects the ultimate attenuation of the confessor's claim to symbolic efficacy in this play.

Taken together, *Romeo and Juliet* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* demonstrate the complex cultural legibility that confession retains as a mode of staging secrecy and interrogating intersubjectivity on the post-Reformation English stage. The plays make clear the extent with which the Catholic ritual remains associated with recognizable signs and predictable scripts for penitence and expiation and governed by conventional institutional power relations. The durability of the ritual in the cultural imaginary as a trope and symbol charged by, but not confined within, an architecture of spiritual power, makes it a provocative space for play as Shakespeare and Ford alike evoke, rework, and work against expectations as a means of staging nuanced contests of discursive and intersubjective agency. Scripts that seem to favour one set of interpersonal power dynamics and work toward conservative patriarchal ends can, it turns out, be inverted or destabilized through strategic inhabitations of the discursive roles of the ritual, demonstrating both the persistent and generative secular utility of once culturally ubiquitous religious ritual and its fungibility and contingency as a performative social exchange.

Ford and Shakespeare alike show how the ritual of confession becomes a creative vehicle for exploring the limitations and instabilities of the concepts that underlie it. If Shakespeare's play illuminates a persistent interest in the confessional as a social space and vehicle for renegotiating conventions of agency and

power, it also refutes its primacy or efficacy as a spiritual ritual. For Ford, a fixation on the politics, erotics, and aesthetics of auricular confession gives way to a finale that willfully resists narrative coherence, signaled by the departure of the one character capable of reconstructing the tragedy. As a secular, rhetorical phenomenon on the early modern stage, confession generates social drama, political anxiety, and narrative itself precisely because the intersubjective forces that govern it prove malleable and unpredictable. Friar Laurence's admonition notwithstanding, Ford and Shakespeare both might be said to riddle shrift, a turn of phrase that renders the ritual a transitive object, fragmented and made strange. In decoupling shrift from the very conventions of spiritual power that define it, these plays are able to probe the discursive possibilities afforded by the confessional to reimagine the workings of intersubjective authority.

Notes

- 1 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. (New York, 2008), 897–972. Subsequent references to *Romeo and Juliet* will be from this edition and cited parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line number.
- 2 See Emily C. Bartels, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore: The Play of Intertextuality', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (Cambridge, 2010), 249–260, 250, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol9780521519373.019>.
- 3 John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, ed. Martin Wiggins (London, 2003). Subsequent references to *'Tis Pity* are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line number.
- 4 Gillian Woods, 'New Directions: The Confessional Identities of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*', in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore: A Critical Guide*, ed. Lisa Hopkins (London, 2010), 114–135, 118, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781623563240.ch-006>.
- 5 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1990), 61–2.
- 6 Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject* (Manchester, 1990), 68.
- 7 Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law & Literature* (Chicago, 2001), 89.
- 8 Gary B. Ferngren and Ekaterina N. Lomperis, *Essential Readings in Medicine and Religion* (Baltimore, 2017), 156, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.72137>.

- 9 On the role of confession in the social and theological debates associated with the English Reformation, see Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ, 1977).
- 10 Andrew Sofer, 'Absorbing Interests: Kyd's Bloody Handkerchief as Palimpsest', *Comparative Drama* 34.2 (2000), 127–153, 128, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cdr.2000.0040>.
- 11 Paul D. Stegner, *Confession and Memory in Early Modern English Literature: Penitential Remains* (Hampshire, 2015), 107, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137558619>.
- 12 Philip Massinger, *The Renegado*, ed. Michael Neill (London, 2010). Another rare example appears in Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (ca 1590), when Father Barnardine hears Abigail's confession before she dies; he later explains her secrets were 'told to me in shrift; / Thou know'st tis death an if it be revealed' (3.6.50–1). Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, in *The Complete Plays*, ed. Frank Romany and Robert Lindsay (London, 2003), 241–340.
- 13 Michael Neill, 'Introduction', in *The Renegado*, by Philip Massinger, ed. Michael Neill, 37–40.
- 14 Examples include Webster's *The White Devil* and *Duchess of Malfi*, Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, and Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*. For further discussion, see Michael J. Redmond, *Shakespeare, Politics, and Italy: Intertextuality on the Jacobean Stage* (Farnham, UK, 2009).
- 15 John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Leah S. Marcus (London, 2009).
- 16 Gillian Woods, *Shakespeare's Unreformed Fictions* (Oxford, 2013), 1.
- 17 Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca NY, 2011), 75, <https://doi.org/10.7591/cornell/9780801449789.001.0001>.
- 18 Martin Wiggins, 'Introduction,' in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (London, 2003), 28.
- 19 Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (Abingdon, 2014), 39–42.
- 20 Arthur Brooke, *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, *Early English Books Online (EEBO)* (London 1562; STC: 1356.7), A1v.
- 21 James C. Bryant, 'The Problematic Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*', *English Studies* 55.4 (1974), 340–50, 340, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00138387408597632>.
- 22 Dymrna Callaghan points out that staged productions 'tend to emphasize [Friar Laurence's] weakness, and he is usually regarded as a comic character'. Bryant and other critics have explored his comedic potential in relation to his manipulations in greater depth. Marjorie Garber, in assessing the destructive powers of the patriarchal order in the play, links Friar Laurence's limitations to his stasis as a character, arguing that he is 'established as a fixed type'. See Dymrna Callaghan, *Romeo and Juliet: Texts and Contexts* (Bedford, 2003), 380; Bryant, 'The Problematic Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*,' 340; and Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All* (New York, 2005), 196.

- 23 Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 76. Beckwith makes this claim in the context of an argument about the Duke as faux-friar in *Measure for Measure*; she argues, with this play Shakespeare references anti-fraternal sentiment to critique not the theatricality of the church but the theatricality of the monarchy.
- 24 Judith Butler has explored how such hailings are formative, initiating 'the individual into the subjected status of the subject'. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London, 1993), 121, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203760079>.
- 25 See for instance Lynette Hunter and Peter Lichtenfels, *Negotiating Shakespeare's Language in Romeo and Juliet: Reading Strategies from Criticism, Editing and the Theatre* (Farnham, UK, 2009), 113, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315597683>.
- 26 Rachel Prusko, 'Youth and Privacy in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Early Theatre* 19.1 (2016), 113–36, 124, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.19.1.2400>.
- 27 See Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven CT, 1999), 347.
- 28 Sharon Hamilton suggests that Shakespeare 'is no advocate for Capulet's embodiment of paternal power, contrasting him to the Friar who recognizes her 'strength of will', see Hamilton, *Shakespeare's Daughters* (Jefferson, NC, 2003), 19–21.
- 29 Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago, 1995), 2–27.
- 30 Jill L. Levenson, 'Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: The Place of Invention', in *Shakespeare and Language*, ed. Catherine M.S. Alexander (Cambridge, 2004), 127, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521570476.004>.
- 31 Many productions cut the speech altogether. Bertrand Evans critiques the speech for 'detai[n]g the final curtain', but suggests that it must be tolerated because it reminds us of the bewilderment of the characters onstage. Bertrand Evans, 'The Brevity of Friar Laurence', *PMLA* 65.5 (1950), 841–65, 841, <https://doi.org/10.2307/459577>.
- 32 Bartels, '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*: The Play of Intertextuality', 253.
- 33 Bryant reflects a persistent strain of criticism that suggests that Friar Laurence 'seems to suffer no sense of guilt' in his final speeches; he contrasts that with the guilty behavior Friar Laurence shows in fleeing Juliet's tomb. In contrast, Holland suggests that this speech is indeed a recapitulation driven by Friar Laurence's personal sense of responsibility. Bryant, 'The Problematic Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*', 349; Peter Holland, 'Introduction', in *Romeo and Juliet* (New York, 2000), xxxix.
- 34 Brooke, *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, Fo.80–Fo.84.
- 35 Bartels, '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*: The Play of Intertextuality', 250, 252.
- 36 Woods argues that confessional identities inform the 'play's central conflict of will and repression'. See Woods, 'New Directions: The Confessional Identities of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*,' 127, 114.

- 37 For instance, Martin Wiggins connects this to broader intellectual conflict in seventeenth-century England between Christian doctrine and secular humanism. Wiggins, 'Introduction', 12–16.
- 38 Tambling, *Confession*, 68.
- 39 Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 2012), 30, 28. Foucault goes on to detail the function of the tortured body in the construction of public truths in early modern Europe (33–47).
- 40 Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 48.
- 41 This exchange reflects a Protestant critique of, in Alan Stewart's words, the 'traditional sexual reputation of the confessional, both in its physical space and as a source of sexual information for the confessor'. Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton NJ, 2014), 59, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400864577>.
- 42 For further exploration of questions of female bodily (il)legibility, see Holly Barbaccia, Bethany Packard, and Jane Wanninger, 'Maybe Baby: Pregnant Possibilities in Medieval and Early Modern Literature', in *Gendered Temporalities in the Early Modern World* (Amsterdam, 2018), 213–34, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9789048535262.010>.
- 43 Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford, 1997), 135, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198183860.001.0001>. In addition, Neill delves into the specific symbolism of the heart in 'Tis Pity in Michael Neill, "'What Strange Riddle's This?": Deciphering 'Tis Pity She's a Whore', in *John Ford: Critical Re-Visions*, ed. Michael Neill (Cambridge, 1988), 153–79, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-21397-5_12.
- 44 Mathew R. Martin, 'The Raw and the Cooked in Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore'', *Early Theatre* 15.2 (2012), 131–46, 133, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.15.2.913>.
- 45 For more on the concept of 'doctrinal simultaneity', see Stegner, *Confession and Memory in Early Modern English Literature*, 107.
- 46 Sofer has described the Catholic connotations of the bloody handkerchief in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, and while the it is tempting to view this letter in similar terms, the connection to the mass is less direct. See Sofer, 'Absorbing Interests'.
- 47 Martin, 'The Raw and the Cooked in Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore', 133.

