

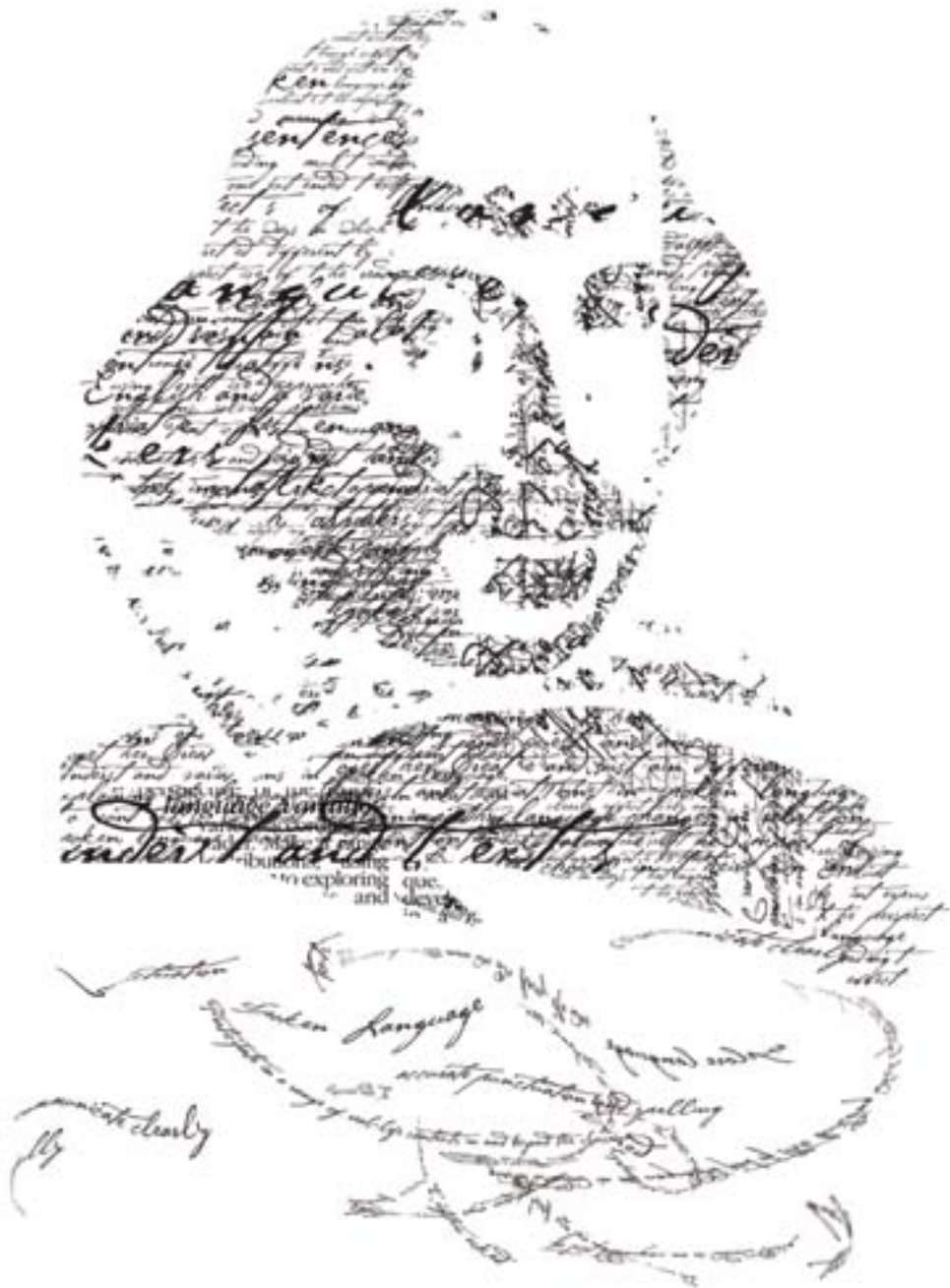
A LEVEL

ENGLISH LITERATURE H071 H471

INTRODUCTION AND GUIDED READING

'TIS PITY SHE'S A WHORE

John Ford



John Ford - 'Tis Pity She's a Whore

From September 2012, OCR will be introducing new set texts for unit F663. To support you and your learners through this change, OCR has commissioned senior members of the examining team to write an introduction and guided reading list for each text in Section B. You can choose to use these materials with your learners as you see fit.

John Ford 'Tis Pity She's a Whore

Life and Works

John Ford was baptized in Islington, Devon in 1586; he is best-known for a trio of plays all published in 1633, but probably dating from some years earlier. These are *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *The Broken Heart* and *Perkin Warbeck*. 1633 is eight years into the reign of Charles I and only nine years before the closure of the theatres at the outbreak of Civil War, making Ford one of the last major writers in what is arguably the most significant stretch of dramatic achievement in British history. We have no idea how or exactly when he died (possibly in 1639?), and only know certainly that he was a gentleman by birth, and spent most of his productive years at the Middle Temple in London, one of the Inns of Court. He wrote non-dramatic works in the reign of James I, but towards the end of that reign seems to have switched to the stage. Eight plays are probably his, together with (as is usual with playwrights at this time) a number of collaborations. It looks, therefore, as though Ford had several other careers besides that of dramatist, and it is probable (though not certain) he wrote his most accomplished work well into middle age, perhaps surprisingly, given that so many of the plays, like *'Tis Pity*, are focused on the experiences of youth and its appetite for transgression.

Another certainty is that Ford the dramatist seems to have been keen on tackling thorny issues. Early in his career (c. 1616) he co-authored an astonishing lost play with Thomas Dekker, called *Keep the Widow Waking*, about a con man and his accomplices who plied a 62 year old widow with drink to force her into marriage so they could get their hands on her goods. Unsettling themes in his surviving work include forced marriage in his tragedy *The Broken Heart*, and the career of a royal pretender who behaves with more true nobility than the king in *The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck: a Strange Truth*. And in *'Tis Pity* a brother and sister fall powerfully in love - another 'strange truth' which has to be faced.

It is often suggested that his interest in problems without easy solutions may have been encouraged by his connection with the Middle Temple, which he entered when he was about sixteen in 1602 and he seems to have remained part of this institution until his death. He did not necessarily practise as a lawyer, but many of his fellow Templars did, and disputation - debating legal and moral conundrums - was an essential element in their training. So even those whose contact with the law was minimal were part of an environment where ideas were continually being tested. The Middle Temple, like the other Inns of Court, was a cross between a university, an unusually lively gentleman's club, and a cultural centre. It was a place full of actual or future poets, playwrights, judges and legal theorists. Ford must surely have witnessed much defiance of authority, much challenging of established positions, and plenty of physical iconoclasm: the young men of the Inns were often in trouble for brawling and practical jokes. Members often visited the theatre, or talked theatre, sometimes bringing plays and entertainments in house: Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* had its first performance there in February 1602. The Middle Temple seems to have provided John Ford with a lively, continuing education over many years, though our only description of him suggests a hint of melancholy - or perhaps more than that - in his disposition:

Deep in a dump Jack Ford alone was got
With folded arms and melancholy hat.

William Hemminge, An Elegy on Randolph's Finger

AO4 Biographical and
literary contexts

The End of the Line?

A favourite approach to Ford's work has always been to gather up the numerous echoes of earlier English dramatists in his work and decide whether they represent creative allusion to the work of these writers; or else a kind of 'end of season' homage to them; or possibly merely a sequence of tired or decadent borrowing. The likelihood is something of each. Plays very obviously echoed in 'Tis Pity include Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, one of the earliest masterpieces of the English Renaissance (c.1588), Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1594-95), and Middleton's quasi-realist *Revenge Tragedy, Women Beware Women* (c.1621). All three plays are worth considering as sources and analogues of 'Tis Pity.

Many audience members would have picked up echoes of one of the most popular Elizabethan plays, Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*. For the critic Cyrus Hoy, writing in 1960, 'Ford's Giovanni is a young Faustus, dabbling in forbidden love as Marlowe's hero has dabbled in forbidden knowledge.' Both exhibit 'fatal intellectual pride', destroying themselves by specious reasoning and an easy sense of superiority to 'The laws of conscience, and of civil use' (5:5, 70). As in Marlowe's play Giovanni's over-reaching becomes perhaps guiltily attractive. As in Marlowe, the wages of sin is palpably death, but fatal transgression simultaneously achieves creative glamour.

If Ford is aware of *Faustus*, he often seems virtually to rewrite *Romeo and Juliet*. Two lovers cross an even more extreme divide than that between Capulet and Montague – 'kinship, unlike faction, cannot alter' – and therefore their tragedy 'is that they were not born of separate families', says Richard McCabe. There are also evident parallels between the plays' two Friars, the Nurse and Putana, the socially desirable suitors Paris and Soranzo, and the sudden deaths of Mercutio and Bergetto. Ford consistently darkens the picture: the Nurse, although she may laugh about 'falling backward', is an innocent compared with Putana. The murder of the foolish, easily contented, child-like Bergetto is more horrifying, perhaps even more unexpected, than Mercutio's death.

Juliet stabs herself voluntarily - the dagger suggesting sexual fulfilment in death - where Giovanni stabs and carves Annabella in what can seem more like rape and dismemberment than loving climax. There is no equivalent in 'Tis Pity to the sense of a possible new beginning, of lessons learnt, in the closing moments of *Romeo and Juliet*. Where Capulet and Montague are finally forced together by their children's death, Florio, the lovers' only father here, dies of shock and shame. Where the Prince mildly declares that 'Some shall be pardon'd, and some punishèd', the Cardinal proclaims savage punishment (Putana) and dubious exemption (Vasques). Chorus commemorates, at the beginning of Shakespeare's play, the idea of 'star-cross'd lovers'. Giovanni also insists that his fate drives him on, but in his case it seems more like self-delusion than the 'inauspicious' fortune that generates ritualized slaughter in Capulet's monument.

No doubt it is an over-simplification, but there may be some truth in the idea that the differences between Shakespeare's Italian tragedy and Ford's reflect those between the 1590s and the 1630s: post-Armada confidence versus an increasingly troubled society in the run-up to Civil War. Nevertheless both *Romeo and Juliet* and 'Tis Pity transfer the causes and implications of tragedy onto the society that nurtured it, making it important to see the lovers of both plays in their small-town contexts and against a background of middle-class assumptions and only partly restrained desires.

Though there are fewer verbal echoes and close situational parallels, the canonical play that most closely anticipates 'Tis Pity is Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (c. 1621). Both plays introduce a carefully graduated social ladder, with courtly interventions from the upper class, including a morally ambivalent Cardinal. Both transfer aspects of English citizen comedy to an Italianate setting, with a grimly sensational ending, thus producing a dramatic hybrid sometimes called 'City Tragedy'.

Continued

Both introduce a glamorous Masque (as do many Renaissance plays) as a lead-in to and cover for grisly developments. There are obvious matches of characterization too: Middleton's Guardiano doubles Ford's Donado; Guardiano's silly nephew, simply called Ward, parallels Bergetto; and the patriarchs of the two plays, Florio and Fabritio, have to come to terms with similar challenging predicaments, though Ford's characters all have lighter sides to their temperaments compared with their equivalents in Middleton. Middleton also includes an incestuous sub-plot: the tainted love of Hippolito for his niece Isabella.

Until the 1960s Ford's work was often dismissed as a 'tired pastiche' of earlier writers. Since then critics have tended to view Ford as more intelligently absorbing, varying and reassessing the Elizabethan and Jacobean conventions. His 'belatedness' thus turns from defect to advantage.

AO4 Literary contexts
AO2 textual parallels
AO3 Ford's changing reputation

'This paper double-lined with tears and blood': editions of the play

Among the editions which students will probably find most helpful are those by Derek Roper (Revels Student edition, 1997) and by Marion Lomax in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Other Plays (1998). Both contain efficient explanatory notes. Sonia Massai's edition in the Arden Early Modern Drama series (2011) provides reliable, detailed notes and excellent performance history. Her New Historicist introduction will prove bewildering at A2. Other useful editions include the New Mermaid (edited by Martin Wiggins, 2003).

A good introduction to drama of the period more generally is Sandra Clark's Renaissance Drama (2007).

AO2 Text of the play



Plot Counter-Plot

Ford's play is best-known for, and most frequently revived for, the glamorous interaction between brother and sister, Giovanni and Annabella. After the opening scenes, however, that liaison retreats to the margins (or the bedroom) of a play that is concerned more widely with the simmering viciousness of a small Italian town. The lovers' story is only one among arguably five mutually entangled plot-strands. Many directors have tried to reduce the play to its most charismatic illicit couple: but this ignores the carefully woven links between the simple sordidness of Ford's Padua and the more idealized transgressions of Giovanni and his sister. It is because the town is so complacent, even commonplace in its sinfulness that the incest-theme, whether we embrace or deplore it, rises into clearer air and achieves a kind of distinction. It is often pointed out that, though dismissed in the past as a blood-boltered decadent, Ford is a writer of poise and delicacy. His verse depends on carefully managed effects, with its abundant feminine endings and 'dying falls' evolving a characteristic music. His play is constructed delicately, too. No section of his plot is freighted too heavily: his dominant principle is apposition. Attempts to trim or even amputate the sub-plots expose not a hidden vivacity but the luxurious languor that sustains Giovanni and Annabella's mystique. There is even a touch of confusion about it, which the play's fluid time-scheme does not try to reconcile: in 5:1 Annabella busily repents, but in 5:3 Giovanni exults in the continuance of their union. So the luminous lovers remain half-hidden in their city of dithering patriarchs, mean adventurers, canting clerics and whores. John Ford does not mean us to gaze in upon them too often.

There are four sub-plots, frequently making unexpected and unprovoked contact with one another, linked by the desire of various suitors for Annabella. Soranzo and Grimaldi, introduced first, are Annabella's most socially elevated suitors, both involved in quarrels with Soranzo's servant Vasquez, who goads Soranzo's former mistress to take revenge on her former lover. The third plot-strand concerns an engagingly dense 'silly gentleman', who aims vaguely at Annabella, but is quickly consoled with Philotis, the niece of a creepy visiting medic, Richardetto. The fourth plot is organised around Richardetto's attempt to kill Soranzo with various Machiavellian devices, as a pay-off for cuckolding him with his wife Hippolita. The effect is of a nest of hornets buzzing at Soranzo, who has variously offended Grimaldi, Hippolita, Vasquez and Richardetto; inevitably, after the fashion of the Elizabethan revenge play, there is much confusion of identity and purpose, and several misconceived and violent deaths. Meanwhile brother and sister mingle in idealized stillness, undisturbed (possibly even by Annabella's marriage to Soranzo). Thus the links between the main-plot and its tributaries solder up the moral design of the play. 'Regarded as the ultimate breach of natural law,' writes Richard McCabe, 'incest becomes a powerful metaphor for other forms of social or political corruption.'

AO2 Structure of the play
AO3 weight given to
various sub-plots

Incest: 'Nearness in birth or blood doth but persuade/A nearer nearness in affection'

Newcomers to the play sometimes find the lack of imaginative resonance behind Ford's use of the incest theme puzzling and disappointing. They are used to the cult of brother-sister incest which continually recurs to the Romantic vision: brother eyeing in sister, or sister in brother, the existence of self apart from self that makes sense of an increasingly godless universe. This sense of mystical affinity between siblings, of thinking thoughts or speaking words that seem equally to belong to another, is at the heart of Dorothy Wordsworth's addiction to her brother (which she can only depict as sexual love) in the *Grasmere Journal* (1800-03); it is plainer still in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), where, though Heathcliff may be (at best? or worst?) Catherine's half-brother, he completes her universe by simply existing within it: 'Nelly, I am Heathcliff!' For the Romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, incest is, 'like many other incorrect things, a very poetical circumstance.' Ford's 'incest-mongers' may have just such poetical defence of their liaison; but they never share it with the rough outer life of the play. Generally Giovanni is keener on cultivating an iconoclastic demeanour than on giving explanations; while Annabella, between couplings, is more likely to deplore what she is doing (3:6) than to verbalise her motives, and is at last conventionally penitent (5:1). This is why the most successful presentations of Giovanni and Annabella have tended to be as very young people: Giovanni polished, experimental, open-minded, too solipsistic to seem outwardly selfish; Annabella wishful and naïve, in some ways as malleable as Shakespeare's *Cressida*, but not so pervious to the blandishments of the outer world. There is something visionary about their love, as Charles Lamb perceived: they possess

that fiery particle, which in the irregular starting out from the road of beaten action, discovers something of a right line even in obliquity, and shows hints of an improvable greatness in the lowest descents and degradations of our nature.

But their idealism and outlawed obsession is hinted at, rather than fully unpacked.

Attitudes to incest vary in different societies, including Ford's and ours. There is clear biblical condemnation – 'Cursed be he that lieth with his sister ...' (Deuteronomy 27:22; cf. Leviticus 18:6) – and most seventeenth-century moralists were in no doubt about the potential of such couplings to subvert social order as well as divine fiat. It also threatened the family order: Annabella as she dies calls Giovanni 'Brother, unkind, unkind' (5:5, 93), punning on his unfamiliar as well as cruel deed; their child dies with her, and Giovanni has 'Broke [their] old father's heart' (5:6, 62) as well as extracting Annabella's.

Incest occurs in other Renaissance tragedies but is mostly either a purely destructive force, like Malefort's insane infatuation with his daughter in Philip Massinger's *The Unnatural Combat* (1624-5), or is treated more obliquely, as in Ferdinand's violent but not explicitly incestuous feelings for his sister in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614) – or Hamlet's attitude to his mother. Only 'Tis Pity, with often noted audacity, explores fully the implications of committed, mutual, sexual and romantic love between siblings. In so doing it gives a new twist to the other forms of illicit or unsanctioned pairing which are common in Revenge Tragedy – the adultery of Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores in *The Changeling*, for instance. The love of Annabella and Giovanni is at once criminal (as usually perceived) and pure; for Giovanni

The laws of conscience, and of civil use
May justly blame us, yet when they but know
Our loves, that love will wipe away that rigour
Which would in other incests be abhorred (5:5, 70-3).

Continued

This love can never be simply criminal or simply idealized. Annabella repents (3:6, 5:1) but goes on loving; Giovanni kisses her as he kills her. Juno, Queen of Heaven as we are reminded at 1:2, 202, was not only Jove's consort, but his sister also.

Some readings and productions emphasise that the siblings have not seen each other recently. He has just finished his studies in Bologna and she does not initially recognise him (1:2, 140-3). Thus their sexual attraction may not be elective but 'genetic', a now recognised phenomenon.

AO4 context of incest in the play
AO3 Relative importance
of incest as a theme

'Enter SORANZO unbraced, and ANNABELLA dragged in': Caroline Theatre

According to the title-page 'Tis Pity She's a Whore was first performed by Queen Henrietta's Men at the Phoenix Theatre in Drury Lane, also known as the Cockpit. This was one of the 'private' or hall theatres - indoor playhouses where admission cost between sixpence and two shillings and sixpence; as against a penny or twopence at the much larger amphitheatres. There was considerable overlap between audience, staging and playing styles at the two sorts of venue. It is quite possible that the company staged Ford's play at its capacious open-air Red Bull as well as the diminutive Cockpit, whose stage would only have been a third of the size of the open-air equivalents.

Quieter, more intimate effects would have possible at the Cockpit, where recorders and hautboys (early oboes, as at 4:1.35 SD) were used more often than trumpets and drums, and candle-light supplemented daylight. 'Gallants' could pay to sit on stage there too, maximizing close contact between actor and audience.

The Cockpit stage was thus good for creating claustrophobic effects and domestic fights, inward-turned incest, or the narrow society which stops at the Cardinal's gate. The feast of 4:1 may have seemed more like a crowded middle-class family wedding than the grander sort of event possible at the Red Bull or the Globe. Hippolita's intervention - like Giovanni's entry with the heart at the feast in 5:6 - must have been all the more emphatically disruptive.

The players of 'Tis Pity also made good use of the symbolic possibilities of the gallery, or area above the stage. The Cardinal and Grimaldi probably used it literally to look down on the citizens. In 1:2 the presence of Annabella and Putana 'above' frames the female character as an object of the gaze of men both 'below' and in the audience (Martin White), while also permitting a Troilus and Cressida like survey of the male characters as they are introduced. And as Sonia Massai notes, it is on the upper stage in 5:1 that Annabella refashions herself 'from whore . . . to a tragic, elevated character'.

For details of the Cockpit and theatre in the period more generally see Andrew Gurr's *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642* (third edition, 1992).

AO2 Use of stage space

Anatomising women

The Renaissance saw the development of investigative anatomy by Andreas Vesalius and his successors and, by extension, dissection of the mind in works including one of Ford's favourites, Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). Several recent studies have noticed that the Cockpit had much the same shape and dimensions as contemporary anatomy theatres. Whether or not the similarity occurred to audiences, women in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* are subject to burning, gouging, poisoning, haling by the hair and - closest to dissection - ripping out the heart; and they are 'anatomised' as whores, sinners, adulteresses. 'Women associated with dangerous sexual passions are controlled through the mutilation of their bodies' (Marion Lomax).

Marion Lomax also looks at the way education as well as the dissecting knife and revenger's sword divides the male and female characters of the play. Giovanni rejects the Friar's arguments 'because it suits him to do so' and Annabella's most imperious suitor Soranzo 'twists religious arguments to make threats against Hippolita and exonerate his own behaviour.' Men 'assume the authority to challenge laws' but women are conditioned not to do this, 'lacking the education which invites reasoning and intellectual challenge.' In order to survive, the women must maintain 'a semblance of respectability', and so Annabella cannot simply dismiss the Friar's advice to marry (and repent).

The quantity and quality of feminist-inspired responses to this and other Renaissance plays cannot, however, mask the impression that Ford under-wrote his female roles. Annabella is, as one recent theatrical reviewer put it, 'less a living character than a moving target for misogynistic abuse'; Hippolita is a stock cast-off mistress; Philotis, even before she takes the veil, something of a 'gracious silence.' Only Putana, punished for her insight like Gloucester in *King Lear*, possesses a feisty individuality; yet, as we have seen, some of that is borrowed from Shakespeare.

AO4 Medical contexts
and attitudes to women

Holy men and Italians

Ford's Cardinal easily fits into contemporary Protestant assumptions about the Roman Catholic Church; among his most obvious stage ancestors is the Cardinal in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, whose transgressions include keeping a mistress, poisoning her, and becoming complicit in the persecution and murder of his own sister. Ford's Cardinal clearly also belongs to an Italy of suborned and suborning villainy, to the land of Machiavelli – Marlowe's 'sound Machevill' in the prologue to *The Jew of Malta* – and Borgia poisonings, a place where it is easy to end up with 'Italian cut-works in [your] guts' (Webster, *The White Devil*). He also represents, with his secular partner Grimaldi, extortion on a grand scale, scandalously (in the eyes of an audience of the time) seizing gold and jewels 'to the Pope's proper use': he is the Pope's 'nuncio'. But the Cardinal cannot be dismissed as a hate-figure pure and simple. As the main surviving man of authority at the end of the play, he speaks for part of the Caroline audience in his orthodox condemnation of 'incest and murder' (5:6,161), a religious rather than a merely Catholic position.

The context of the other Churchman, the Friar, is more difficult to determine and allows a greater range of interpretation by the actor. Is he unsympathetic, sternly laying down the religious law, including the lurid threats of Hell in 3:1, and therefore unable to put himself in the lovers' passionate position? His encouragement of Annabella's marriage to Soranzo is certainly spineless and ill-advised – but is it any worse than that? Like Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet* he is not particularly imaginative, and cannot anticipate how badly his advice will backfire. His breaking off pummelling Giovanni with threats and ultimata and returning to Bologna may also make him seem more human in the eyes of the audience (5:3, 67-8): it seems he has 'a world elsewhere.'

Friars – including Shakespeare's Friar Laurence and the sharper Friar Francis in *Much Ado About Nothing* – have a generally benign image on the stage at this time compared with other Catholic clergy. The two main groups of Friars, Franciscan and Dominican – Bonaventure is named after a thirteenth-century Franciscan saint – emphasised preaching and charitable involvement with the community, not the prayerful seclusion favoured by some religious orders.

Ford wasn't even necessarily hostile to Catholicism in all its forms. Research by Lisa Hopkins has shown that he had close contacts among the English Catholic gentry.

AO4 Literary and social contexts

'Burn, blood, and boil in vengeance!'

Whatever the moral complications which ensue, the most famous Elizabethan and Jacobean revengers start from the need to redress a single clear wrong. Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607), for instance, wants retribution on the Duke for poisoning his lover. But in Ford's revenge is problematic from the beginning, with most of the would-be revengers in some way tainted or compromised, and many complications and even confusions of interest. Grimaldi wants to kill Soranzo simply out of rivalry for a woman, and the feeling is mutual. Soranzo's ungentlemanly handling of Hippolita, however, makes hypocritical his vengeful flourishes towards her. For her part Hippolita is tainted by her own adultery with Soranzo, her cuckoldry of Richardetto, and her devious employment of the brutal Vasquez. Giovanni paradoxically kills the woman he has both elevated and violated. Vasquez (the closest the play comes to a conventional revenger) is happy to kill anyone who wishes Soranzo ill, yet eggs him on when he seems in danger of forgiving Annabella, and glories in his cruelty to both Hippolyta and Putana. The intricacy and diffuseness of these intersecting plots directs audiences from the beginning to doubt whether revenge can ever be more than the wildest of 'wild justice' (Bacon's famous phrase).

AO4 Literary contexts

City Tragedy

Verna Foster has pointed out the similarities between 'Tis Pity and the earlier Citizen Comedies of playwrights including Thomas Middleton. There is an urban setting, albeit provincial Italian rather than City of London. Most of the characters, Foster points out 'conform less to the usual figures of Italian revenge tragedy than to the gamut of urban types who populate Citizen Comedy: merchant, scholar, doctor, nobleman, braggart soldier, clever servant, rich fool, nubile girl, adulteress.' The Bergetto sub-plot is, until near the end, the stuff of Citizen Comedy (and comedy more generally), making his death more shocking. As in the comedies too there is an acute awareness of social rank Foster instances the noblewoman Hippolita's scornful reference to Annabella as 'your goodly Madam Merchant' (2:2, 49).

Parma, like Middleton's London, is apparently a citizen-led city, and the early scenes with Florio and Donado suggest their powerful position within it. But its narrow boundaries are demarcated too when the officers pursuing Grimaldi dare not go beyond the Cardinal's gate and the seemingly authoritative citizens are treated with open contempt by the Cardinal himself. The Cardinal is again in charge at the end of the play, flourishing the plenary power of Rome. He hands out, with exemplary respect for social distinction, punishment for Putana and an escape-route for Vasques (servant of the 'noble' Soranzo).

Foster's essay is in John Ford: *Critical Re-Visions*, ed. Michael Neill (1988).

AO4 Literary contexts
AO3 View of the play
as (partly) comic.

'Come, strumpet, famous whore!'

Prostitutes looked for trade in the playhouse audience, and inevitably presentations of whorishness on stage would attract prurient (mostly male) interest. To a modern audience these women are not literally prostitutes, but it was open to audiences in Ford's day to tar with the same brush any female transgressor of the sexual rules. Hippolita is an adulteress; Putana's very name means 'whore'; Annabella, as the final lines make clear, is the pitiable incestuous 'whore' of the play's title, whose potential to infect the body politic may have disturbed Ford's original audience more than it can a modern one. Philotis, who becomes a nun, is the only female with a speaking part allowed to escape the blood-letting and name-calling. Soranzo's 'reason' tells him 'that 'tis as common/To err in frailty as to be a woman' (4:3,148-9).

But perhaps the emphasis in the title and the concluding line of the play should be on the second word rather than the last: Ford's invitation to pity the whore as victim. Bergetto, a limited but attractive fellow, nevertheless views whoring as the male default option: rejected by Annabella, he says he can have 'wenches enough in Parma for half-a-crown apiece' (2:6, 119). When he develops less mercenary feelings for Philotis there is obvious contrast with the other men who continue to treat women like whores, particularly the hypocritical Soranzo and arguably, at the end of the play, even Giovanni. More broadly, there is so much sexual and moral hypocrisy in Parma that we are forced, as in other matters, to question whether the moral freighting of the City is sufficiently heavy to outweigh the incestuous love of the central couple.

One critic has even argued that Parma is not just a City of routine whoring, but the whore named on the title page of the play.

The play's title has proved, down the years, almost as problematic as its content. The poster for the 2010 West Yorkshire Playhouse production got into hot water with the local Roman Catholic Church when the word 'Whore' in the play's title was reproduced too close to an image of the virgin Mary. The title has regularly metamorphosed, for antiseptic reasons, into Giovanni and Annabella or Brother and Sister, simultaneously downsizing the play's concerns; and there may even be a touch of squeamishness behind the regular Thespian contraction, 'Tis Pity.

Corinne S. Abate's essay on 'Identifying the Real Whore of Parma' is in the very useful recent survey 'Tis Pity She's a Whore: A Critical Guide, edited by Lisa Hopkins (2010). This work includes pieces of criticism and performance history from the seventeenth century to the twenty-first.

A04 Social/historical contexts

'Enter GIOVANNI with a heart upon his dagger'

The actor playing Giovanni may originally have brought in a real animal's heart, some kind of ingenious prop, or some obviously non-illusionistic object designed to emphasise the symbolic possibilities. Whatever it was, this is the moment in the play which usually attracts the most attention. It is often used to brand Ford's work, and sometimes early seventeenth-century drama in general, as decadent or gratuitously bloody: 'Romeo and Juliet meets Quentin Tarantino'. Giovanni's outrage can be interpreted in various ways. It may be, as for Rowland Wymer, a confirmation of his solipsism: as 'Giovanni clutches the bleeding heart, he thinks he possesses Annabella, but in fact he is left in a world of his own' (Rowland Wymer, Webster and Ford, 1995). It may become a tragic rite of passage: Ian McKellen's Giovanni, for the Actors' Company in 1972, changed at this point 'from a passionate boy to an unassailable angel of death, stalking into the banqueting hall with Annabella's heart' (Irving Wardle, writing in *The Times* on 4 March 1988). Yet it may be only confirmation that for all his talk of love and fate, Giovanni has simply been mad all along.

Another approach is to see the heart as a 'stage image' - an object which makes concrete a line of imagery, as when the 'serpent of old Nile' is killed by an asp in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. The physical appearance of Annabella's heart follows many proleptic heart references: among other examples see 1:2, 223, 4:3, 53/4, 5:5 57, 78, 102, 105. The imagery of Petrarchan love - 'I digged for food/ In a much richer mine than gold or stone/ Of any value balanced' (5:6, 23-5) - has been horrifyingly enacted. More simply, incest with your sister could be seen as ripping out her heart, the dagger at once phallic and destructive. Or perhaps the point is that Annabella has more 'heart' than most people in the play, Giovanni no doubt included. For Dorothy M. Farr the heart on the dagger is 'a gathering together in a strong visual impact of the sense of physical, moral and spiritual violation which runs through the entire action' (John Ford and the Caroline Theatre, 1979).

AO2 'heart' as a symbolic and literal presence in the play

Modern productions

Two of the most informative discussions of productions since 1940 are in Sonia Massai's edition in Arden Early Modern Drama series (2011) (pp. 45-64) and by Kate Wilkinson in Hopkins' Critical Guide (2010). The play was pretty much unknown on the stage from Ford's time until 1923. Thereafter it has rarely been absent from it, though often in productions short on Ford's text but long on added business (particularly songs). Issues arising from performance include the importance or otherwise of the sub-plots - omitted or truncated in some versions; how far the lovers are to be seen as sympathetic innocents or knowing participants in the wider corruption; and how Giovanni's entrance with the heart is to be managed if either too much laughter or too much revulsion is to be avoided. A number of productions have modernized the setting, most often to a later Italy of gangsters or mafiosi - of 'haunting vespers and revving Vespas' in the West Yorkshire Playhouse version as reviewed by Dominic Cavendish in The Telegraph (19 May 2011). The 2011-12 Cheek By Jowl version also offered a tremendously entertaining theatrical experience, with an all-dancing cast and a hot-gospelling Friar: more creative riff than straight interpretation. It also recovered some of the intimacy of Caroline productions at the Cockpit by setting the whole play in the space of Annabella's bedroom and en suite bathroom. What it sometimes lost by concentrating on Annabella's sexual retreat, however, was the sense of a wider, more generally corrupt society. Bergetto (like Poggio and Philotis) was omitted and with him the rough humanity of his death and the cynical protection of his murderer by the ecclesiastical establishment. Cheek by Jowl stopped at Florio's death, with Giovanni holding the heart, and the spirit of the dead Annabella looking on. Thus the play's final bloody twigs were lopped off - the deaths of Soranzo and Giovanni, the banditti, the sentencing of Putana to burn. These are the elements which can make some productions dated or chaotic or unintentionally funny, but if well handled they can also force, as we have seen, a parting vista of an irretrievably tainted society, not just a bloodstained apotheosis of star-crossed lovers.

What drama critics agree upon that the play remains socially precise, and eclectic stagings must keep the operation of Parma and its institutions coherent. Retaining sufficient interventionist potential for the Catholic Church is essential, and this can be problematic if an Italian setting later than WW1 is chosen.

What little can be seen on screen includes a powerful clip from Luchino Visconti's 1961 Paris production - *Dommage qu'elle soit un putain* - in which Alain Delon and Romy Schneider declare their love for each other with lyrical intensity (available on Youtube). Giuseppe Patroni Griffi's lurid film, originally made in 1971 under the title *Addio, fratello crudele*, was issued on VHS under the Redemption label (in English) but is now difficult to obtain (Youtube has extracts). If tracked down the film is likely to prove strong meat in the classroom, as the tape seems to carry an 18 certificate, despite the packaging's 15. The screenplay is 'freely adapted from John Ford's tragedy' and does not follow the author's verse patterns. Again much sub-plot material is eliminated to concentrate on the relationships of the lovers, the Friar, Soranzo and a wanton Putana - all portrayed as young, fey and beautiful. Inevitably the film's narrow focus means it loses pace, but this suits its bleak, dreamy ambience. It is notable for its images of imprisonment or constriction: barred windows, cages, the well into which Giovanni hurls himself; but also for a fire of passion burning under a flue that looks like hell's mouth: 'The torment of an uncontrolled flame!' (5:1, 23). It ends in discriminate butchery, with every relative of tainted couple put to the sword. Giovanni, not Putana, is dismembered.

AO2 Staging the play
AO3 Impact of different
production choices

This resource has been produced to support your delivery of OCR's GCE English qualification. These are not mandatory but are provided to offer you creative and informative materials that you may wish to use with your learners.

Disclaimer

Please note that whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the content, OCR's resources are provided for general information purposes only to be used at the discretion of teachers and centres. The resources are provided for guidance purposes only and do not constitute an endorsed teaching method that is required by the Board.

OCR shall not have any liability whatsoever for any losses, including losses for any misinterpretation, or subsequent impact howsoever caused.