

'Tis Pity She's a Whore: Modern Productions and the Scholar

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[*"Concord in Discord": The Plays of John Ford, 1586-1986*, ed. Donald K. Anderson, Jr. (New York: AMS Press, 1987), pp. 87-108]

In recent years, more and more critical trumpets have sounded the call for the treatment of Shakespeare's plays not as poems or novels but as works written for and therefore most fully realized in the playhouse. Although open to any imaginative reader, such an approach is particularly suited to that Shakespearean scholar able to travel (especially during the summer) who can then sample a wide variety of productions in the United States, Canada, and England, a range of options that can include even less familiar titles such as the *Henry VI* trilogy, *Titus Andronicus*, *King John*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, and *Henry VIII*. Whether at summer festivals or in university settings, the critic or teacher who does wish to take the step from page to stage therefore has at least some opportunity, however limited the production, to see a given Shakespeare script performed by actors in front of a live audience. As a result, at least some kind of testing ground is available for the ideas and assumptions of the academic interpreter wrestling with Shakespeare's plays.

No such opportunity, however, is available for the scholar working with plays by other dramatists in the age of Shakespeare. Although the list of productions in any given year may sound impressive, such shows are widely scattered, often of limited duration, and usually not well advertised. Only the most devoted American Ford enthusiast, moreover, will make a special trip across the Atlantic to see *Perkin Warbeck*. Advantages that the Shakespearean takes for granted (e.g., the opportunity to see the nunnery scene or "to be or not to be" done in a variety of ways) therefore are denied the reader of Marlowe, Jonson, Webster, and Ford. No series of BBC-TV productions, moreover, is likely to remedy the situation.

Admittedly, many scholars do not lament this shortage of on-stage renditions and would rather lump actors and directors in that category formerly reserved for the students of a decade ago who took considerable pains to "trash" what the traditionalist held sacred. In some cases, this mistrust or antipathy is rooted in scholarly vested interest, wherein the academic playgoer leaves the lecture hall and goes into the theatre expecting, even unconsciously demanding, that his or her interpretation be affirmed or validated (what I think of as the salvific approach to criticism: accept my reading or be damned!). To buttress such anti-theatrical prejudices, academics can tick off examples of shallow or wrongheaded choices made by actors and directors (each of us has a store of pet examples--e.g., *Henry V* on roller skates). The experience of the play on the stage can also be frustrating for that critic who seeks the "definitive" reading of a character or entire work, for a fundamental truth that emerges from regular playgoing is that "meaning" is subject to a wide array of variables not spelled out in the extant texts and hence open to the interpretation of the actor and director. To move the text into the theatre is often to lose that sense of fixedness taken for granted by many academic critics.

Yet to treat the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries as theatrical scripts rather than literary texts is both to explore more fully their meanings and distinctive effects and to confront a wide variety of problems otherwise hidden from the reader treating the same signals as if words in a novel or a poem in dialogue form. Rather, when the plays are bodied forth through the voices, limbs, and costumes of actors, both the theatrical and academic professional becomes aware of pregnant silences and hidden traps, including many features that would have been taken for granted by the original dramatist, players, and spectators but are lost or obscured today (e.g., stage conventions of various kinds, including emblematic costumes and properties). An intelligent and well-realized production,

moreover, can provide a range of insights not available even to the most imaginative reader, for skilled actors and directors can probe a script through and beyond the rehearsal process in ways that go far beyond the resources of even the most careful explicator. Needless to say, many productions do not achieve this level of insight or do so only fitfully, but the opportunity is there if (and it is a big "if") the academic playgoer approaches the theatrical experience with a mind open to new meanings and juxtapositions rather than a mind fixed upon the "right" interpretation. This process of exploration can yield insights, answers, and even new questions, especially when brought to bear upon a play not regularly produced.

All of which brings me to two recent productions of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* through which I, for one, learned a great deal about Ford's play both because of and occasionally in spite of the choices made by actors and directors. The first is a Royal Shakespeare Company production directed by Ron Daniels (1977-8) and presented at The Other Place in Stratford-upon-Avon and The Warehouse in London (where I saw it). The second is an Oregon Shakespeare Festival production (1981) directed by Jerry Turner and presented in the Bowmer Theatre. The RSC rendition was a small theatre production with a limited budget; the Oregon venture was elaborate and full-scale. I choose these two productions (certainly not the only major renditions of this tragedy in recent years) because I was able to see both, talk to some of the personnel, and examine the promptbooks.

What then is to be learned from these two productions? To start with a simple yet revealing example, consider the most notorious moment in the play: "*Enter Giovanni with a heart upon his dagger*" (V.vi.9.s.d.).¹ The critic, responding to the charge that Ford here is pandering to the jaded palates of his audience, quite rightly may point to the imagistic or symbolic potential in this stage image, but a director, faced with an audience not conversant with the critical literature, must contend with the danger of losing this climactic scene to one or another spectator reaction (shock, laughter) that may block out what is happening or what is being said. Thus, a colleague told me of his experience at a production at Yale in the 1960s where the audience, fully engaged with the action up to this moment, burst into gales of laughter when someone in the auditorium was heard to whisper quite audibly: "My God, that's a heart on his dagger!"

To avoid such a situation, Oregon director Jerry Turner took several steps. First, the property Giovanni carried in was cunningly constructed so to be one piece that appeared to the spectator to be three different items (the heart, the dagger, and a covering cloth). The actor (Stuart Duckworth) therefore did not have to struggle with two lurid properties and risk overdoing the effect (the dagger, it should be noted, was extractable for use later in the scene). Equally important, the cloth provided a rationale for the on-stage reaction to Giovanni's appearance, a reaction that otherwise can puzzle the reader, for despite Giovanni's repeated references to Annabella's heart and his holding of such an object before the eyes of Florio, Soranzo, and the others, no one (at least according to the dialogue) quite understands what is going on or what this passionate figure is saying, at least until Vasques's re-entrance with the confirmation of Annabella's death. To justify this initial confusion or obtuseness, the Oregon Giovanni therefore started with the impaled heart almost fully covered by the cloth (in his obsessiveness he assumed everyone already knew what he had done) and then gradually revealed, both to those on-stage and those in the audience, what he was holding. To the reader the change may seem slight, but in the theatre this gradual unfolding was suspenseful and highly effective without eliciting embarrassed laughter or gasps of shock that might have subverted the scene. Granted, some critics may have preferred such shock and even not have minded audience laughter (such is the nature of both critical and theatrical interpretative choices), but this approach, linked to a perceived problem that actor and director wished to avoid, did work.

Consider too a larger problem found in many plays from the age of Shakespeare (and often sidestepped by critics): the function of subsidiary plots or actions in a larger design. Thus, most commentators on *Tis Pity* have agreed that Ford was primarily or even solely interested in the central incestuous love story and therefore failed to develop meaningfully the other characters and actions. As a result, despite the actual allocation of dramatic time (at least before IV.iii) Giovanni and Annabella dominate both critical discussions and modern productions, so that figures like Richardetto and Hippolyta, despite their prominence at key points, get short shrift (e.g., in the Oregon production Richardetto's disclosure of his true identity in the final scene was cut). Of particular interest is Bergetto, who plays a substantial role in the first three acts and whose murder by mistake occasions a major confrontation with the Cardinal. For Donald K. Anderson, Jr., Bergetto is "a comical booby" who "proves more tiresome than funny and does not serve as an effective parallel or foil to either Giovanni or Soranzo."² Similarly, after looking at a group of plays, Juliet McMaster concludes that Ford's attempts at comedy fail because "he evidently feels more contempt than sympathy for his comic characters," for "just as he cannot smile at his main characters, so he cannot see any potential for pathos in his buffoons." Of Ford's comic figures, she describes Bergetto as "perhaps the one who comes nearest to being funny."³

In his RSC production, director Ron Daniels too was primarily concerned with Giovanni and Annabella (although actors Nigel Terry and Geoffrey Hutchings provided telling renditions of Soranzo and Vasques); nonetheless, just before the interval this director did provide a striking and memorable moment (for me, the high point of this production) built around subsidiary figures, including perhaps the least memorable named character in the play, Poggio. Thus, in contrast to the overall corruption and venality in this Parma, Bergetto was presented as a foolish but likable youth who, after being rejected by Annabella, found an innocent and praiseworthy love with Philotis, a pairing that provided on-stage an island of normality and innocent fun in a world otherwise characterized by treachery, hypocrisy, and incest. Poggio, as played by Ron Cook, was then a beleaguered, good-natured, and intensely loyal retainer who truly loved his master--again, providing a quality and kind of bond missing elsewhere. Bergetto's murder by mistake at the hands of Grimaldi was a strong moment in this production, not just because of the grief expressed by Philotis and Poggio but also owing to the feeling conveyed to the spectator of something fragile associated with love and loyalty that, for a moment, had been found and recognized but now had been erased from Parma. Even at this point (and with little help from the critics), the director and actors had made good sense out of Ford's dramatic strategy.

Daniels, however, took this insight or discovery a step farther, for when Florio, Donado, and Richardetto arrive at the Cardinal's house to demand justice for the murder (III.ix), the director made one of his few changes in Ford's script (otherwise almost uncut, except for some later moments involving the Banditti). Thus, before the appearance of the Cardinal, Florio asks questions about the murder and gets three responses from an officer who, in effect, fingers Grimaldi as the murderer and points to the Cardinal's house as his refuge. When Donado asks someone to knock at the gate (in this production, an impressive railed gate, one of the few permanent parts of the set), Poggio replies: "I'll knock, sir," his only line of the scene and his last in the play. Probably for reasons of dramatic economy (given a small number of actors), the director here eliminated the officer and gave his lines to Poggio, a small but telling change that further involved this grieving figure in the scene and enabled the actor to show himself emotionally distraught at the murder of his master and clearly thwarted and frustrated as he was forced to stand by silently during the confrontation between the Cardinal and the equally helpless citizens of Parma who can do nothing but lament: "Is this a churchman's voice? Dwells Justice here?" (l. 63).

What then stayed with me long after the production was over was the image presented just

before the lights came up for the interval. After the departure of a subdued and disheartened Florio, Donado, and Richardetto, Poggio was left on-stage alone, in his grief, anger, and frustration shaking the rails of the iron gates. Something of value (something only recently appreciated by the spectator as being of value) has been destroyed (an excellent preparation for the deaths that follow, especially the fate of Annabella). Others may resign themselves (Florio comments: "Great men may do their wills, we must obey") or casually write off Bergetto's death as "merely chance" (Grimaldi's self-serving comment), but at least one figure cries out and, however vainly, tries to strike back. Aided by the addition of the officer's lines, this Poggio for a moment has moved to the center of the action (in various ways, in this production he was at the heart of this scene) and has demonstrated forcefully that the world has been diminished by Bergetto's death (and by the cavalier treatment of Justice). We have no way of knowing how this director's choices fit with the original production or Ford's intentions, but, in my opinion, his staging of this scene realized the function of such a subordinate action in such a tragedy. Not only was this sequence "good theatre" for a modern audience, but it also conveyed something significant about "the world" of Ford's play and what lies beneath the surface of that world so that an attentive spectator could understand more fully the tragic events to follow. For anyone willing to pay attention, the purpose of such an analogous or preparatory action as set up by a Ford (or a Shakespeare) is therefore being realized. And where among the critics will the scholar find a discussion of Poggio?

Another choice a few scenes later in the RSC production also brought a subordinate action into better focus. Thus, even though after Hippolyta's death Donado orders "bear hence the body" (IV.i.107), the director left the body in a circle of light on a darkened stage, so that the audience saw in succession Soranzo gloat over her, the Friar moan over her, Giovanni and the Cardinal unconcernedly step over her, and finally Richardetto and Philotis stand over her, bearing candles, to deliver the lines that constitute IV.ii. Granted, such a directorial choice goes against Ford's apparent signal, yet, especially for a modern audience not accustomed to multiple actions and theatrical counterpoint, the presence of the body (heightened by the pool of light) helped to underscore various connections between Hippolyta's fate and others in the play, especially Philotis, who here is sent off to a nunnery in Cremona to "free your years / From hazard of these woes" (IV.ii.15-16), and Richardetto, the unintentional accomplice to Bergetto's murder, who now recognizes "there is One / Above begins to work" (II. 8-9). The fact of Hippolyta's death, epitomized in the highly visible presence of the body, is first welcomed by one source of the play's violence (Soranzo) and then ignored by key figures who have already condoned violence (the Cardinal) or will soon initiate it (Giovanni). The body then provides a rich context for the choices and postures acted out in the next scene, so that the limited candlelight on an otherwise dark stage revealed a would-be revenger destroyed by her own plot, a former revenger whose attempt only killed the wrong man and who now admits a higher law, and an innocent woman whose only recourse is to flee this world. Just before the final movement that begins in the next scene, the director has found a way to heighten the darkness of this tragedy, especially for the heroine who stays in Parma (and this director's later choice to have Vasques carry in Annabella's body further underscored the link between the two young women).

The Oregon production also provided some instructive moments. For example, the director established a firm and revealing connection between the two major Giovanni and Annabella scenes. Thus, in their first on-stage confrontation that builds to a mutual declaration of love (I.ii), both figures knelt facing each other and joined hands, with Giovanni's knife erect between them, so that "love me, or kill me" provided a potent mixture of sexuality and potential violence. In their final meeting (V.v), the two figures again knelt and joined hands, recapitulating that earlier moment, but this time Giovanni quite visibly held the knife behind his back and soon used that weapon in a bloody murder (on the bed) and in the bloody aftermath in the next scene. If perceived, the link to the earlier scene

strengthened the continuity of the action and imagery and helped us better to understand the tragedy (the end implicit in its beginnings). Again, as with Poggio's plight in the RSC rendition, one of the most striking moments in the Oregon production was something I had never taken note of as a reader, Annabella's acquiescence to the marriage to Soranzo. Here, after giving in to the Friar in private (III.vi.42), Annabella is confronted in public first with her father, then with Soranzo and is forced to say yes to the marriage (with Giovanni standing by, silently, for the second declaration). In this production, the director cut Giovanni's aside (ll. 47-8) and kept him on-stage, so, in his presence, Annabella had to respond to Florio's "Daughter, are you resolved?" (l. 49) After a significant pause, with looks at the Friar and Giovanni (two figures who know the full truth), this Annabella wrenched out: "Father, I am" and sealed the tragedy. Giovanni then had to listen while Florio joined her hand with Soranzo's and she pledged "to live with you and yours." That this obviously painful decision was quickly followed by the pointless murder of Bergetto further underscored the potential for violence and tragedy in this situation.

Such directorial choices represent one advantage gained by the scholar-playgoer able to see an intelligent, well-crafted production of *'Tis Pity* (again, a resource Shakespeareans take for granted). Certainly, some interpreters of this tragedy will disagree with the choices I have cited or with my interpretation of what those choices convey in the theatre. My goal here is not to argue in favor of either director's rendition as such but rather to stress the assets of taking seriously any intelligent production as a basic tool and a potential source of insights (and not just into the major figures). Such decisions about Poggio's grief or Hippolyta's body or Giovanni's dagger inevitably involve trade-offs wherein some effect is gained at the expense of another being lost or diminished (such is the nature of all interpretation but especially interpretative choices in the theatre), but such realization of a script in the playhouse can and should open up new possibilities for the reader willing to accept the challenge.

Regular theatregoers can supply their own examples of revelations or discoveries in plays they thought they "knew." Less familiar is a different kind of insight to be gained from modern productions wherein the director's adjustments or changes in the original script can lead an informed spectator to a greater understanding of what was truly Elizabethan or Jacobean in the original play, often by means of elements that do not work (or are judged to be unworkable) for the actor or spectator today. Admittedly, much directorial cutting or reshaping could best be classified as pragmatic or ad hoc whereby theatrical professionals, faced with a limited budget, constraints upon personnel and facilities, and the attention span of a non-specialist audience, omit opaque passages, supernumerary characters (like the officer in III.ix), and apparent anomalies or excrescent moments that do not fit with the flow of the action and would seem to demand too much of the spectator. Many such cuts and changes reveal little more than a cynical (and perhaps quite accurate) appraisal of the intelligence and attentiveness of the modern playgoer. Nonetheless, other more significant changes or omissions can serve as major clues to what separates us from the age of Shakespeare and can even help to pinpoint the distinctive vision of a particular play.

Consider first a problem for the modern director linked to our own theatrical practice rather than the original script: where to place an intermission or interval. For Ford and his audience, brief pauses between the five acts, with musical interludes, would have been the fashion, not the single ten or fifteen minute break playgoers today take for granted. As a result, the imposition of such a break upon a dramatic strategy predicated upon a more or less continuous flow of the action will of necessity create problems, at times significant problems. Thus, as already noted, the RSC production built to a climax with Poggio rattling the Cardinal's gate at the end of III.ix; it started up again with a marriage ceremony in dumb show that led into IV.i (a choice that worked well for me). In contrast, Oregon director Jerry Turner opted to climax his first act with the death of Hippolyta in IV.i, a big scene with a full stage that

then could be cleared of properties during the intermission (a choice familiar from productions of *Macbeth* which often are broken after the banquet scene). But in making such a decision the director must not only be concerned with where he is stopping (some kind of climactic moment) but also where he is starting up again, for the dramatist, who was not thinking in terms of such a decisive stop and start, saw no need to provide a later director with a moment that would re-engage an audience once again settling into their seats after a chat and a drink. In this instance, the interchange between Richardetto and Philotis that follows in Ford's sequence provides a flat and most unpromising beginning for a final movement.

So, having made the decision to end his first act with IV.i, this director transposed the next two scenes and started his second act with Soranzo's jealous tirade against the pregnant Annabella (the beginning of IV.iii), a moment that does pull the audience quickly back into the world of the play. Such a change (for similar reasons, not uncommon in Shakespeare productions as well) may then in turn cause the scholar in the audience to ponder: what indeed is the logic behind Ford's sequence? Even without the continued presence of Hippolyta's body, the interpreter still can recognize that the choices acted out by Richardetto and Philotis in IV.ii mean something quite different if they closely follow Hippolyta's death and immediately precede Annabella's exposure rather than if they follow IV.iii. Thus, Richardetto sends off Philotis not because of Annabella's disgrace (a chain of thought implied by Turner's transposition) but rather because of what he has glimpsed of the power of that One above (as revealed in the death of Bergetto) and what he has seen Hippolyta do to herself (wherein the revenger seeking to poison an enemy only succeeded in poisoning herself). To the reader solely interested in Giovanni and Annabella, IV.ii may seem only a final dose of subplot to be endured before the main event, yet it does orchestrate a set of attitudes towards human actions in the context of a larger framework of apparent importance to the dramatist. To change the placement of this scene is then to change that context and, in effect, to change radically the meaning and function of the sequence as a whole.

Admittedly, few interpreters of Ford's tragedy care enough about Richardetto and Philotis to challenge such a transposition, but, in contrast, the role of that larger framework invoked by Richardetto has been and continues to be a hotly contested issue, especially in relation to the two lovers. Most critics have taken a middle position between the extremes represented by the "romantic" approach of G. F. Sensabaugh and the "orthodox" reading of Mark Stavig⁴, but the problem persists. As R. L. Smallwood sums it up (in his revealing comparison of Ford's play and *Romeo and Juliet*), "if one is to feel unqualified approval of the lovers here," then, quite clearly, "the voice of orthodox religion" conveyed by the Friar "has to be rejected, much more blatantly, and much more often" than in Shakespeare's play. Smallwood then asks: "Can one find, in the verbal power of Giovanni's expressions of love and defiance of orthodox morality, a counterbalance to the attitudes that Ford no doubt expected his audience to take into the theatre with them and which in any case he provided in the play through Bonaventure?"⁵ The question is further complicated by several other factors. For example, many critics have stressed the weakness of the Friar as a spokesman for orthodoxy (not to mention the even more obvious limitations of the Cardinal), yet Stavig and others have called attention, among other things, to the clear echoes in the Friar's key speeches of Ford's own earlier penitential work, *Christ's Bloody Sweat*. Clearly, to most modernists Giovanni is far more appealing than the Friar, but, as Smallwood asks, for that original audience would this appeal have been enough to offset the context and implied judgments generated by the many references in the dialogue to Hell, Heaven, and the One above?

Both the Oregon and RSC directors would answer yes, so, as a result, in both renditions the Friar was a wishy-washy figure whose arguments, especially with Giovanni, carried little weight. RSC

director Daniels described Ford's Parma to me⁶ as a shallow, "conventional," bourgeois society where mercantile values permeate the characters' view of family, society, religion, and even repentance (herein he saw an analogy to *The Godfather* where a hit man, soon after a murder, could ask for pardon, be forgiven, and be ready to kill again). Except perhaps for the innocent Bergetto, this director felt that no one cares very much about the fates of most of the figures who populate this dramatic world. The exceptions, of course, are Giovanni and Annabella, two figures he described as "subversive" in that, although they may have started with the same assumptions about family and religion, they soon move far beyond, elevating themselves in his terms "into the stratosphere" and leaving the rest of the characters behind or below (and herein lies a major reason for the distinctive appeal of this tragedy for so many people today, the reason it is staged more often than other comparable plays). As Daniels describes the tragedy, Giovanni seeks to reach and then maintain a position above the merely "conventional" world (and almost succeeds) but is thwarted by Annabella's situation: first, her pregnancy (something the idealistic lover had not taken into account); then the subordinate role thrust upon her by society in the name of honor and marriage, a series of complications Giovanni cannot face squarely. To avoid losing her to this lesser world, Giovanni (by this logic) must kill her, an act that for him represents a victory in that it preserves what they have achieved.

Since both productions took such a "romantic" or "subversive" approach (and consequently played down various "orthodox" elements), the playgoer aware of the on-going critical debate had a good opportunity to observe which moments in the original script worked well according to this logic and, most interesting for my argument, which moments caused problems. As a point of departure, consider the second encounter between Giovanni and the Friar after the former has reported the consummation of the incest, an account described by the latter in orthodox terms as "a tale whose every word / Threatens eternal slaughter to the soul" (II.v.1-2). Giovanni's Neo-Platonic defense of his love as "both fit and good" (II. 12-26) is seen by the Friar only as "ignorance in knowledge" (I. 27). Rather, this spokesman for orthodoxy argues that "if we were sure there were no Deity, / Nor Heaven nor Hell" (an important "if" clause), "then to be led alone / By Nature's light--as were philosophers / Of elder times--might instance some defence." Not surprisingly, however, the Friar concludes: "But 'tis not so," and adds: "then madman, thou wilt find / That Nature is in Heaven's positions blind" (II. 29-34). Predictably, Giovanni responds to this condemnation with the argument of youth ("had you youth like mine, / You'd make her love your Heaven, and her divine"), in the process turning the "heavenly" terms to his own advantage, so that the Friar can only answer: "Nay, then I see th'art too far sold to Hell" (II. 35-7). The subsequent exchange, in which the Friar counsels marriage for Annabella, only antagonizes Giovanni (along with many readers today) and provokes the lover's hymn to his mistress's physical beauty (II. 49-58), so that at the end of the scene we are left with Giovanni in his ecstasy of love and the Friar disconsolate that "things being thus, a pair of souls are lost" (I. 69). Nowhere in the play are the battle lines between the romantic and the orthodox more clearly drawn.

The Friar's "if" clause and his conclusion (both of which carried little weight in either production) bear closer scrutiny. According to this voice of orthodoxy, in the "elder times" (the world of philosophers who lived before the Christian revelation) a lover indeed might doubt the existence of Heaven, Hell, and the One above and therefore "might instance some defence" of such a love. "But 'tis not so" now, according to the Friar. Rather, when judged not "by Nature's light" but by the light of Christian revelation, Giovanni is defined as a "madman" and his distinctive brand of madness is further defined as that of "Nature" or the natural man who "is in Heaven's positions blind." Although both Giovanni and many modern interpreters reject the Friar's analysis and definitions, nonetheless Ford here has provided some specific coordinates to map the "blindness" of this tragic protagonist and has prepared the reader or spectator for some later actions that also involve seeing, blindness, and "Heaven's positions."

In a companion scene an act later, the Friar then counsels and converts a distraught and pregnant Annabella. The unusually explicit stage direction sets up a very different image from his previous encounter with Giovanni, for here the Friar is "*sitting in a chair*" while Annabella is "*kneeling and whispering to him, a table before them and wax lights; she weeps, and wrings her hands*" (III.vi.0.s.d.). The scene's major speech, the Friar's lurid "lecture" on Hell (ll. 7-23), stresses the punishment meted out to sinners and builds to the particular pains in store for incestuous lovers. In contrast to the Friar's failure to move Giovanni, this lecture does (apparently) have its effect upon Annabella who repents her actions, acquiesces to a marriage to Soranzo for her "honour's safety" (l. 36), and agrees, in order to "save your soul," to "leave off this life" with Giovanni "and henceforth live to him" (Soranzo), a commitment she then makes publicly in her pledges that climax the scene.

The Friar's lecture, with its lengthy and highly traditional account of Hell, has much in common with comparable passages in *Doctor Faustus*, Nashe, and Donne, not to mention Ford's own *Christ's Bloody Sweat*.⁷ Both the lurid terms and the stage picture set up by the elaborate stage direction are all quite orthodox and would have been familiar ground to an audience in the 1620s. What is at issue for many modern interpreters, however, whether in the theatre or the study, is the efficacy in Ford's Parma of this and other such passages that invoke Hell, Heaven, and the One above. Thus, Joan Stuart-Morris, the Oregon Annabella, felt strongly that to render this and equivalent moments "straight" today would be to convey a character or effect she described as "priggish," one out of keeping with the play as a whole. In contrast, from the outset her Annabella was not innocent and unworldly but rather, with a spark of lust in her eye, needed little coaching or encouragement from her brother. During this apparent conversion scene (buttressed by some lurid lighting effects) she therefore played an Annabella excited, even "turned on" by the Friar's account of Hell, to the extent that her sighs at key points (e.g., ll. 24, 39) consistently drew a reaction, including patches of laughter, from the audience. Clearly, for this actress and for this production as a whole, the Friar's account of Hell was no more than a series of words (impressive words perhaps) that could affect, even titillate a distraught and isolated young woman but did not necessarily carry any weight on an absolute scale. Rather, in a modern "romantic" context, the images and concepts orchestrated here had no real efficacy or force.

But, as I discovered from this production, the actress who undercuts Annabella's repentance in III.vi then will have severe difficulties with the lines she must deliver (and the total situation) in V.i (perhaps the hardest scene to make work for a modern audience). Rather, Ford provides here highly orthodox speeches in which Annabella refers to "false joys," the inexorable movement of Time, a conscience that "now stands up against my lust," beauty that is only an outside, and Grace, as she builds to a selfless wish that "the scourge due to my black offence" not fall on Giovanni but solely upon her so "that I alone might feel / The torment of an uncontrolled flame" (ll. 1-23). She then pleads that "some good man / Pass this way" to transmit her warning letter to her brother, and vows, if her wish is granted, "repentance, and a leaving of that life / I long have died in" (ll. 32-7). The fortuitous presence of the Friar who overhears her at just this moment is then repeatedly and emphatically associated with Heaven. First, he responds to her plea: "Lady, Heaven hath heard you, / And hath by providence ordained that I / Should be his minister for your behoof" (ll. 37-9); moments later, she asks: "Is Heaven so bountiful?" (l. 44) and concludes the scene: "Thanks to the heavens, who have prolonged my breath / To this good use; now I can welcome death" (ll. 58-9).

These links in the dialogue between Annabella's pleas to Heaven and the Friar's presence as postman are too blatant to be ignored, so (as I discovered) this scene poses particular problems for the interpreter who sides with Giovanni in his lack of faith in Hell and Heaven (as opposed to the vivid reality of Annabella's beauty). This rebel against orthodoxy, of course, is not present in V.i to witness

the apparent efficacy of Heaven (at least for those who believe or trust in it). Rather, Ford has set up two separate tracks for the two lovers (especially if we take seriously Annabella's repentance in III.vi), with her letter, both here and in V.iii, a test case for both (so, against all odds, the letter is delivered but, once delivered, it is not believed). Indeed, at least in this scene Ford appears to be going to considerable lengths to prevent the reader or spectator from accepting wholeheartedly Giovanni's position that subordinates Heaven, Hell, and the deity to "Nature's light."

To underscore the contrast between Annabella and Giovanni, Ford provides in V.iii a companion scene to V.i where again one of the lovers speaks alone and is then joined by the Friar and where again the focus is upon the letter written in blood. Giovanni's insights and conclusions, however, are diametrically opposed to Annabella's, for he talks not of false joy, conscience, and inexorable Time, but rather exults in the continuing sweetness of their love and the glory of their united hearts. Instead of invoking Hell and Heaven he exclaims: "let poring book-men dream of other worlds, / My world, and all of happiness, is here"; and proclaims that he would "not change it for the best to come" for, to him, "a life of pleasure is Elysium" (V.iii.13-16). At the appearance of the Friar (his last in the play), Giovanni refers to the "jubilee / Of my retired delights" and asserts confidently that "the Hell you often have prompted is nought else / But slavish and fond superstitious fear" (ll. 17-20). The Friar, in contrast, delivers Annabella's letter with the line: "Thy blindness slays thee," thus reinforcing the imagery of II.v (e.g., "Nature is in Heaven's positions blind"). Again, as in that earlier scene, the romantic and orthodox views collide, for the Friar describes his former pupil's conscience as "seared," while Giovanni rejects any "religion-masked sorceries" (ll. 29-30).

In one of the key moments in the play (a moment particularly difficult for the modern actor and not realized well in either production), Giovanni then acts out his distinctive blindness by reading and rejecting the letter. Significantly, he starts with a clear recognition of the letter's source ("Tis her hand, / I know't"), but as he reads on and encounters the unwelcome news ("she writes I know not what--death?") he chooses to reject what he literally sees before him ("discovered? / The devil we are! which way is't possible?") and therefore can conclude (just before the arrival of Vasques with the invitation to the fatal feast): "'tis but forged!" (ll. 31-40) Ford has structured this scene so to demonstrate clearly that Giovanni cannot or will not accept any unwelcome truths that interfere with his life of pleasure that he equates with Elysium. Given both Annabella's scene with the letter (that acts out her selfless concern for her brother and the expense of her own blood in this effort) and the brief V.ii (in which Soranzo and Vasques set up the plot against Giovanni that Annabella has tried to forestall), the reader or spectator is well aware of the truths that Giovanni here will not face. That "blindness" or faulty seeing, moreover (that can reject as forged a letter obviously in his sister's hand), is also linked clearly in this scene ("thy blindness slays thee") to this rebel's disdain for the efficacy of Heaven and Hell ("nought else / But slavish and fond superstitious fear"). In a manner that poses a particular challenge to the modern actor, Ford is spelling out Giovanni's "tragic blindness" in a major speech that builds more upon metaphor than psychological realism.

Although not quite as obvious, these same images are also to be found in the final scenes. First, moments before the murder, Giovanni ponders how the waters might burn when "all this globe of earth" is consumed by fire (as set forth in *Revelations* xx-xxi); he adds: "could I believe / This might be true, I could believe as well / There might be Hell or Heaven." When Annabella responds: "That's most certain," Giovanni rejects such a proposition as "a dream, a dream," and goes on to raise the question (quickly dismissed) whether the two lovers will be able to know each other "in this other world" (V.v.30-41). Although Annabella continues to be concerned with the imminent threat to Giovanni ("what d'ee mean / To free yourself from danger?"--ll. 42-3), he ignores the plots of Soranzo and Vasques and pursues instead his own logic that leads to the murder of his sister and the ripping out of

her heart. His dying lines in the next scene then refer back to the lines here about the lovers knowing each other "in this other world": "Where'er I go, let me enjoy this grace, / Freely to view my Annabella's face" (V.vi.106-7). The effect of this passage upon the original reader or spectator may have been complex, for, as one recent critic has observed, the reference may call to mind the image (also found in *Christ's Bloody Sweat*) of Dives in Hell looking up as part of his torment to see Lazarus in Heaven.⁸ If grasped, the allusion suggests that Giovanni's abuse of worldly sight ("thy blindness slays thee") has led to a different kind of vision linked to that larger framework this rebel has consistently belittled or dismissed.

To buttress my metaphoric argument, let me insert a conjecture about the original staging. As already noted, at the outset of III.vi Ford provides an elaborate stage direction for the Friar's lecture to Annabella on Hell, a theatrical signal that begins: "*Enter the Friar in his study, sitting in a chair.*" Earlier editors, much concerned with "placing" such scenes, added their own headings for this action such as "The Friar's Cell" or "Florio's House" or "Annabella's Chamber"; in his Regents edition, N. W. Bawcutt provides "*Enter the Friar sitting in a chair*" and notes: "Q's in his study clearly seems an error, as the scene takes place in Annabella's bedroom," an inference drawn from Florio's earlier line: "Come, father, I'll conduct you to her chamber" (III.iv.33). In his Revels edition, Derek Roper does include the full stage direction from the quarto but then provides a long note that begins: "It is uncertain where Ford meant this impressive scene to be located." Roper suggests that the dramatist initially may have been thinking of the Friar's cell, yet line 44, with its reference to "below," "suggests that we are still in Annabella's chamber, with Soranzo waiting downstairs" (p. 69).

As Roper implies, in making full use of the chameleon-like open stage dramatists from Marlowe to Ford did play fast and loose with "place" in our sense (e.g., see *Romeo and Juliet*, I.iv/v and *Henry VIII*, V.ii/iii). But also at stake in this and similar moments is how we today read and interpret the original stage directions. Thus, as I have argued at length elsewhere⁹, signals that call for a figure to enter in his study or in prison or in the forest often may imply as in or as if in, so that the emphasis falls less upon "place" and setting than upon the actor's skill in combination with emblematic properties (e.g., fetters for a prison, green costumes or hunting weapons for the forest). For this moment, the signal would translate into an entrance for the Friar carrying a chair (assuming such a chair was not already on-stage) and, most important, carrying one or more books (the key properties in the opening scene of *Doctor Faustus* which also begins "*in his study*"). In my imagined staging, the book or books in this instance would be impressive religious tomes as support for the lecture on Hell.

To conjecture about such a signal in this manner is to run various risks (after all, this tragedy has already spawned enough controversies), but one immediate advantage of such an interpretation of "in his study" is that it sets up a clear visual analogue for two other significant moments in the play. Most obvious is Soranzo's first appearance in II.ii ("*Enter Soranzo in his study, reading a book*") where Annabella's chief suitor first reads aloud and then rejects Sannazaro's negative comments on love and indeed goes so far as to rewrite the lines to suit his own romantic optimism. Here the act of reading ("in his study") clearly is associated with the imposition of the reader's values and worldview upon evidence that would seem to deny or contradict them. Similarly, as just noted, in a later climactic moment Giovanni takes Annabella's warning letter, notes that it indeed is in her hand, reads it, but then ends up rejecting both its truths and its authenticity, thus acting out in extreme form the kind of blindness or willful misreading demonstrated earlier in Soranzo's treatment of Sannazaro.

But if the Friar's lecture to Annabella is indeed linked to the presence of religious books, this moment is in decided contrast to the other two. Instead of rejecting what is in his hand, the Friar as reader accepts the efficacy of such words and indeed (here and later) stresses the danger of not paying

heed. In contrast, in their handling of texts Soranzo and Giovanni act out their unwillingness or inability to face concepts that do not or cannot fit with their ruling passions, a rejection that in Giovanni's case translates into a dismissal of Hell, Heaven and God as "dreams" or superstitious fictions. Whether one thinks of the specific warning in Annabella's letter or the larger religious truths also being rejected, matters of considerable significance are not being factored into Giovanni's equations, so that the Friar's books (if present in III.vi) and the larger framework they symbolize call attention to that missing element and help to clarify the tragic protagonist's distinctive blindness as reader and chooser.

In the "romantic" approach to this tragedy, however, this missing factor for Giovanni is not deemed especially important, so neither production made much of his blindness in metaphoric or spiritual terms. Rather, the actors and directors (like many critics) sided with Giovanni (presented as "one of us") and against the Friar (who epitomized a soulless and joyless religion). But with or without the support of impressive tomes in III.vi, Ford does set forth Hell and Heaven as concepts that carry considerable weight and force, an efficacy (according to the rhetoric of the play) to be ignored only at some risk. Although the balance of romantic and orthodox elements is still very much open to question, to ignore totally the latter is to transform the play much as Soranzo transforms Sannazaro. Ford's actions and images suggest the existence of some force in or around or behind the world of this play, most notably in the Friar's presence in V.i ("Lady, Heaven hath heard you"), so that at least part of Giovanni's tragic blindness is linked to his inability to "see" or accept a framework that transcends his passion for Annabella (a framework she, in contrast, does come to accept). Again, a major function of the Richardetto-Philotis interchange in IV.ii is to demonstrate the alternative fates of a man and woman who have gained from two deaths at least some new insights into love, revenge, and the One above and who therefore, at whatever cost, have avoided the fates of Giovanni and Annabella.

My purpose throughout this essay has not been to find fault with these two productions (from which I learned a great deal about Ford's tragedy) but rather to stress both how much and what kinds of things the scholar can learn from modern stage renditions. Any treatment of religious elements in this play will quickly get embroiled with various on-going controversies, so some readers undoubtedly will side with the actors and directors and question my critique. My own involvement in this problem (or series of related problems) arose largely because of the provocative and often theatrically exciting choices made by the actors and directors in terms meaningful to them and terms they took to be meaningful to their audiences. Clearly, Ford has succeeded in presenting a Giovanni who in a variety of ways strikes many people today as a contemporary figure, a defiant rebel against a repressive society and religion. Yet, as I discovered from these two productions, this modernist insight can block out some significant parts of the Renaissance context into which Ford placed his protagonists, so that several key scenes are changed, even transformed. The implications of what I take to be a predominantly or exclusively romantic approach to this tragedy emerged as my most basic discovery from studying these two productions, a discovery that, in turn, has led me to a greater understanding of Ford's distinctive achievement. Here, in conclusion, is further evidence for the advantages of treating modern productions as a scholarly tool to open up and elucidate the original playscripts.

¹ Quotations are from the Revels Plays edition, ed. Derek Roper (Manchester, 1975).

² *John Ford* (New York, 1972), p. 105.

³ "Love, Lust, and Sham: Structural Pattern in the Plays of John Ford," *Renaissance Drama*, N.S. 2 (1969), 159-60. A. P. Hogan, who provides the best overview of the tragedy's design, devotes only one sentence to Bergetto whom she sees as "the butt of everyone's laughter; yet he alone inspires loud and poignant grief when he falls

victim to Richardetto's greed and Grimaldi's pride" ("*'Tis Pity She's a Whore: The Overall Design*," *Studies in English Literature*, 17, 1977, 315). The best defense of Bergetto is provided by Dorothy M. Farr who describes his dying exclamation ("why, Poggio!"--III.vii.20) as "the protest of all innocents destroyed for no fault of their own through the devious practices and errors of cleverer and worse men." She finds in this simpleton's death both "meaningless brutality" and "a touch of dignity," and concludes that it "presents the violation of innocence in a corrupt society with something of the effect of senseless human disaster in a modern news film" (*John Ford and the Caroline Theatre*, London and Basingstoke, 1979, pp. 42-3).

⁴For helpful overviews on the criticism, see Donald K. Anderson, Jr., "John Ford," in *The Later Jacobean and Caroline Dramatists*, ed. Terence P. Logan and Denzell S. Smith (Lincoln, Neb. and London, 1978), pp. 128-9; and Ronald Huebert, *John Ford: Baroque English Dramatist* (Montreal and London, 1977), pp. 198-200.

⁵"*'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Romeo and Juliet*," *Cahiers Elisabethains*, #20 (1981), 62.

⁶In an interview on July 22, 1983 at the Barbican in London. I am grateful to Mr. Daniels for squeezing out some time for this interview in what was, for him, a very hectic period.

⁷See, for example, *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1904), I, 218-19; II, 168-70; *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959), V, 266-7; *Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus"*, ed. W. W. Greg (Oxford, 1950), p. 287 (B text, ll. 2018-32). For three relevant stanzas from *Christ's Bloody Sweat*, see Mark Stavig, *John Ford and the Traditional Moral Order* (Madison, Milwaukee, and London, 1968), p. 211.

⁸Gilles D. Monsarrat, "The Unity of John Ford: *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Christ's Bloody Sweat*," *Studies in Philology*, 77 (1980), 269.

⁹See chapter five of *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* (Cambridge, 1984), especially pp. 93-5.