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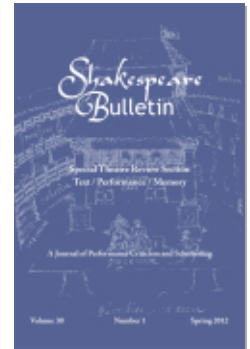
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## Sexing Death: Giuseppe Patroni Griffi's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore

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## Sexing Death: Giuseppe Patroni Griffi's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

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John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633), which narrates the tragedy of Annabella and Giovanni, the siblings whose sexual relationship cannot be sustained within the confines of Parma's religious and patriarchal social structures, is a play that drives relentlessly toward death. What is notable about the play's "death drive" is that it is repeatedly attached to the operation of desire. Declarations of love are shadowed by death, encapsulated by the symmetrical vows that the siblings make where they promise to love or kill one another (1.2.256, 259).<sup>1</sup> This promise is played out with deadly consequences as Giovanni murders Annabella and displays her heart on a dagger, citing it both as a material manifestation of their desire and his possession of that desire (5.6.26–7, 71), before his own death wish is fulfilled by Vasques (5.6.95–8). As such, Ford's text can be described, as I have argued elsewhere via Jonathan Dollimore ("Sex and Death"), as an "exemplar text of desire as a supremely 'death-driven, death-dealing and death-desiring' phenomenon" (91). Whereas my earlier work on Ford's play was concerned with textual analysis in relation to cultural and historical figurations of desire and its conjunction with death, I want here to focus these concerns in relation to performance. Specifically, as the play's narratives of desire drive toward violence and death, what are the implications for spectatorship?

In order to examine this question, I will consider Giuseppe Patroni Griffi's third feature film *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1973), which was released by Miracle Films in the context of the European art house circuit in the early 1970s, following its release in Italian as *Addio, Fratello Crudele* (1971). The film has subsequently been released on VHS by Redemption Films (1993) and on DVD by New Star Video (2006).<sup>2</sup> Notably, Griffi's film is the only cinematic production of the play—Roland Joffé's 1980

BBC version for television excepted (see Susanne Greenhalgh's essay in this issue)—after it began to attract professional performances following its first full public revival since the seventeenth century at the Strand Theatre, London in 1941.<sup>3</sup> Griffi's film—described in the title credits as “Freely adapted from John Ford's tragedy”—strips away the play's subplots that revolve around Bergetto's efforts at seduction and Hippolita's and Richardetto's revenge narratives. Instead, the action concentrates on the interrelationships between Annabella (Charlotte Rampling), Giovanni (Oliver Tobias), Soranzo (Fabio Testi), and unusually in the play's performance history, Bonaventura (Antonio Falsi). Florio (Rik Battaglia), Putana (Angela Luce) and Vasques (Rino Imperio)—relegated to functional names in the credits (the Father, etc.)—inhabit the margins of these relationships. The film is largely comprised of a series of slow-moving stylized set pieces that take place in wintery Northern Italian landscapes including Venice, and fire-dominated interiors littered with abstract sculptures and contraptions designed by Mario Ceroli, which identify the lovers as trapped and childlike. The film also includes numerous sustained headshots of the actors' expressions, elegantly photographed in widescreen Technicolor by cinematographer Vittorio Storaro, that work to focus the spectator's attention on the characters' psychological states, especially their desires. The film's stunning visual images are accompanied by a sonorous and languid musical refrain composed by Ennio Morricone, which repeatedly signals the lovers' relationship. The images are also accompanied by a voice track that, in the English versions at least, offers prosaic, even banal, paraphrases of Ford's text, including several voiceovers, which reinforce the focus on the characters' psychologies that the cinematography works to establish.<sup>4</sup>

The film's atmosphere of measured restraint is, however, punctured at several points by scenes that become increasingly violent as the film progresses, earning the cinema release a classification of X and the video release a classification of 15 from the British Board of Film Classification.<sup>5</sup> These moments are perhaps also responsible for the inclusion of the film by the then newly formed Redemption Films—which specializes in European cult horror, *giallo* (Italian horror and eroticism), exploitation and sleaze cinema—in a list that included *Mask of Satan* (1960), *Salon Kitty* (1976) and *Killer Nun* (1979). The violent vignettes—Giovanni throws himself down a well; Florio is seen arguing with Putana; Soranzo forces Annabella to look at a pair of mating horses, the stallion's erect penis visible; Giovanni rides his horse aggressively at Bonaventura and throws dust in his face; Soranzo assaults Annabella by dragging her by

her hair and tying her to an urn—escalate to the film's protracted and spectacularly violent ending. It is the film's ending that will be the focus of this article as I tease out how it engages with the violence demanded by Ford's text and the implications of this violence for spectatorship.

Much of the small body of previous work on the film seeks to read the heavily stylized art direction symbolically or metaphorically (see Hopkins, especially 64–8; Wilkinson, especially 48–52) or is interested, at least in part, in biographical connections between Griffi's identification as a gay man and the content and form of the film (see Wymer n.p.; Hopkins 58–9; Wilkinson 50; Aebischer 119–20). My concern with how the film's symbolic economy and erotic politics work to position the spectator in relation to the scenes of violence in order to explore the possibilities that the film offers for mourning takes me in a different direction, which is less concerned with using symbols to fix meaning or in appealing to Griffi's sexual preferences as a guarantor for the analysis. In keeping with the narrative requirements of Ford's text, the film exhibits the deadly consequences when desire cannot be contained within the social structures it inhabits. Indeed, if, as Dollimore suggests in a different context, “the absolute object of desire is, experientially, a fantasy of the *absolute release from desire*, i.e., death of desire/death of the self” (“Desire is Death” 375, Dollimore's emphasis), desire cannot but exceed social structures as it drives toward the extinction of the self, encapsulated by Freud's bold contention that the “*the aim of all life is death*” (38, Freud's emphasis). The deadly consequences of desire do, though, regardless of the object, take place in the context of the social. It is part of the project of this article to consider how the film figures these desire-driven deaths in this context.

Through an examination of the death of Annabella and Griffi's directorial intervention into Ford's text in the final moments of the film—the massacre of the extended family and the display and beheading of Giovanni's naked body—I argue that the film's representation of death works to deprioritize the deaths of Annabella and her extended family, excising them from a community of mourners, in favor of reifying (in quasi-spiritual and erotic terms) the death of Giovanni. In Griffi's film, death is not only made sexy in the deaths of Annabella and Giovanni but also “sexed” such that men are afforded more space for mourning—and being mourned—than women. By reading the representations of death in dialogue with one another and, on occasion, by considering differences between the VHS version and the cuts made to the DVD version, I draw attention to this differential. In so doing I aim to consider how spectators are enjoined to look upon violence and the possibilities that the film offers for thinking about the gender politics of death and mourning.

### **“Farewell, cruel brother”**

From her first appearance, Annabella is presented as having some measure of agency in the field of her desire, both in relation to her brother and Soranzo. She is shown watching both men with appreciation, and the sex scene between Annabella and Soranzo is shot as soft porn, primarily emphasising his buttocks and pleasure but also her breasts and pleasure. This through-line continues as the film approaches its deadly conclusion. Giovanni confronts Annabella in her chamber and as his intent to follow through on their deadly vows becomes clear, Annabella undoes her dress and exposes her breasts to him and the spectator, taking his hand that holds the dagger in hers; the camera then registers the tremor of her hand as Giovanni forces the blade toward her, as if she momentarily regrets her decision, encapsulating the film’s Italian title, which translates as “Farewell, Cruel Brother.” Annabella’s possible misgivings aside, the murder is presented as an erotic and romantic embrace where hetero-erotic relations of looking are secured through the shot/reverse shot structure; Giovanni kisses Annabella and continues to hold her after he has stabbed her as the film’s central romantic refrain is heard.

If the film and the play suggest that Annabella has achieved some measure of agency in desire (and, perhaps, even her death), her murder at the hand of her brother and the subsequent display of her heart as a token of exchange between men (it is passed between Giovanni, Soranzo, and Florio during the film’s banquet scene), serves to underline the precarious and heavily qualified nature of this agency, such that death is its outcome. In the sequences that follow, the film works to deprioritize Annabella’s death by restricting the opportunities afforded to mourn her in favor of a sustained meditation on the death of Giovanni. In part this is because the narrative requirements of Ford’s text demand Giovanni’s announcement of Annabella’s death and the public performance of his death for the successful operation of Soranzo’s revenge plot; it is also due, in part, to Griffi’s handling of these deaths. Sandwiched between the deaths of Annabella and Giovanni are those of their extended family, who are present at what Annabella describes as “a banquet of death [that] has been prepared for all of us.”

### **“A banquet of death has been prepared for all of us”**

Whereas the social world in which the characters exist occupies a relatively peripheral position in relation to the central quartet, as the film

approaches its conclusion, the violence that has marked their relationships spills over, if only for a brief period, to shatter that world. This passage from the private to the public is marked by one of the film's most visually arresting moments in which the film cuts from Giovanni's murder of Annabella in the privacy of her chamber to a 38-second tracking shot. Here Giovanni strides the length of a gallery flooded with light as he holds Annabella's muslin-wrapped heart aloft, the click of his heels intensifying as he increases his pace, before he passes through a lethal-looking spike-covered antechamber into a candle-lit dining room, where his arrival is greeted with screams by the assembled guests. Following Giovanni's revelation of his relationship with Annabella and her murder, the narrative takes an unexpected turn as Soranzo commands his men to "let not one member of her family survive," precipitating a massacre of the guests. In contrast to the atmosphere of measured restraint that has infused much of the film, the carefully composed order of the banquet—the guests are seated along two long tables that face one another, men on one side, women on the other—breaks into disarray and the film cuts between images of violence perpetrated primarily against women, in the dining room and gallery. Here it is as if the violence that has been sublimated during much of the film, contained by the lucidity of the almost painterly camera work and the precision of the *mise en scène* where the characters are constrained by cages, wells and tombs, erupts to shatter the social world. In his account of the banquet sequence, Roger Warren writes: "Far from being a shocking outrage it [Giovanni brandishing the heart] let loose a positive orgy of blood-letting in which, again very oddly, Soranzo's servants turned on all the women present and massacred them" (14). Warren does not expand on his sense of the oddness of this action and the scene has attracted very little critical attention, an omission that is perhaps striking in relation to the extremity and unexpectedness, or "oddness," of the violence. In terms of narrative logic, the murders afford Soranzo the opportunity to displace his punishment of Annabella onto the members of her family. The massacre also becomes the mechanism by which Soranzo attempts to erase what Giovanni in the film describes as the "mark of [his] shame" through the eradication of witnesses to his public humiliation. More significantly, the scene's "oddness," in the sense of being different or unusual from what is expected in relation to the action of Ford's play, in which Giovanni kills Soranzo (5.6.73–4) and the banditti wound only Giovanni (5.6.79–85), invites further exploration in relation to the film's gendering of violence (and death) and the implications for spectatorship, especially in relation to mourning.

Although the massacre focuses on some images of men fighting with each other, which are presented with comparative restraint and in relative silence, the overwhelming impression is of sustained violence perpetrated by men against women, embodied in the eruption of violence as the camera rapidly tracks the length of one of the banquet tables at which only women are seated, capturing images and sounds of their screams as they rise from their seats in terror. As the sequence progresses, four women are seen clutching their skirts and attempting to escape by running along the gallery; as they run toward the camera, four men appear from the edges of the frame to capture the women in deadly embraces. One of the women is seen in the background of the shot attempting to escape, before she is swiftly outnumbered by two men and fatally stabbed; another staggers forward, clutching her bleeding stomach, moving toward the spectator before collapsing, almost tumbling out of the cinematic frame. The women scream and attempt to escape, unarmed and unable to defend themselves, in marked contrast to the men, who are armed with daggers, the asymmetry amplifying the vulnerability of the women.

Through these scenes of violence, the film works to solicit the spectators' sympathy for, and acknowledgement of, the women, focusing on their terrorized expressions, screams, and labored breathing rather than assuming the point of view of the armed perpetrators. This is made particularly clear in an image of a woman who is shown on her back being dragged by her hair as she flails, in vain, against the shins of her captor. As she is dragged at floor level, the shot tracks at the same level, registering her terrorized face and vulnerable position. With the corpse of another woman slumped against the back wall as if "looking on," the captor holds a knife and kneels above the prostrate woman, before plunging the blade into her heart. Whereas the earlier death of Annabella was presented in terms of an erotic embrace in which she had some measure of agency, this sequence positions the stabbing as a rape. Spectators are further drawn into the scenes of violence in the moment where the fatally stabbed woman runs toward the camera before collapsing in the foreground of the shot, an action that makes a demand on the spectator to acknowledge the horror of the violence as the injured woman is thrust directly at the camera. This moment is, however, juxtaposed with Putana running past the woman; she registers the scene with a look of terror but does not stop as she attempts to escape toward the apparent safety of some stairs. The film, though, hints that her sense of safety will be short lived as she is followed, ominously, by Vasques. Putana's attempted escape is intercut with scenes from the dining room, where the demand upon the spectator



to look upon and acknowledge the violence is matched with the horrifying realization that looking, or acknowledgement, in the context of the film (and more broadly, I would suggest), fails to stop or mitigate the effects of violence. The fallen woman is offered no assistance and the woman who runs past her, literally bypassing any sense of obligation toward the other, will shortly meet her death. If, according to Emmanuel Levinas, ethical action rests on an infinite responsibility to the other (see especially 187–219), the film offer offers a terrifying vision of what an abandonment of such responsibility might look like, as corpses litter the screen.

While spectators are invited to acknowledge these scenes of violence, positioned as helpless observers to the carnage, the film displays further violence against women through its failure to create space for the human acknowledgement of their deaths within the diegesis, in contrast to the deaths of the men, and of Giovanni in particular. Instead, the carnage of the banquet sequence is followed by an eerily silent sequence in which a large dog lopes through the dining room, inspecting the corpses. When the dog enters the banquet hall and inspects the dead bodies, the camera tracks primarily over the bodies of men, rather than women. Only one woman is seen, positioned near the start of the sequence in the background of the shot, slumped against a wall. This is in contrast to the images of six carefully arranged male corpses, which are shown draped over the tables in various “death poses.” Something between the tables captures the dog’s attention (insofar as a dog’s attention can be known) but these objects (the bodies of the women perhaps?) are not made available to the viewer. As the dog then lopes through the gallery it inspects the first corpse that the camera discovers, which is that of a man. In comparison, barely any attention is accorded, either by the dog or the camera, to the corpses (perhaps they are women) that are present in the background of the shot. This pattern continues as the dog enters Annabella’s chamber, which contains her eviscerated body, draped face down over the bed; the dog briefly sniffs at the foot of the bed, seems to look at her and whines. Tellingly, Annabella’s body is the focus of the camera’s attention for four seconds, which is about the same amount of time allocated to the adjacent shot of the dog’s head.

The comparative elision of female corpses works to negate the significance of the violence meted out against women such that the spectator is invited to acknowledge and remember the deaths of men, rather than those of the women. The elision of the women is further compounded by the cuts made in the New Star release where much of the massacre is deleted, including sequences that focus on images such as the wounded

woman who staggers toward the camera and the dog's inspection of the bodies: in this release, there is no space to remember or witness these deaths. It is also worth noting that both these unnamed dead men and women are not, within the diegesis, offered any form of human recognition or grief, with the discovery of their bodies mediated for spectators through the figure of the dog. These elisions might be read, in Kim Solga's terms, as "in/visible act[s]," which she figures as "the performance of violence against women as critical forgetting; it charges its witnesses to come to terms with what we've missed but also with *how* we've missed" (17, Solga's emphasis). By drawing attention to the corpses of the women that the film all but renders invisible following their massacre, I seek not only to draw attention to the violence—to in a sense rescue it from invisibility, especially from the New Star version, where much of it is literally invisible—but to consider how these acts of violence might be witnessed.

If the lone animal speaks to an absence of a community of human mourners within the diegesis, the dog's whining and the close-up shot of its head, almost as if it was a human face, invite spectators to identify the dog's responses in terms of grief, especially when read in relation to the scenes earlier in the film where Annabella is shown playing with her canine companion; dogs are also used elsewhere in the film as indicators of mood, as when Florio's anger at his lack of control over his household seems to be mirrored in a pack of loose dogs. In effect, the presence of the dog after the massacre solicits spectators to provide the community of human mourners that the film excludes: the dog is asked to do, or at least lubricate, the work of acknowledgment and grief. In locating the dog as a proxy of sorts for grief and mourning, this reading is, as Nicholas Ridout suggests in relation to the presence of animals on stage, "open to charges of anthropomorphism and violence, on the basis that it wrenches the animal from its animal-ness and places it within a world of human signification" (109). Here, though, I'd suggest that anthropomorphism, even as it works to negate the animal-ness of the dog, offers spectators a strategy for acknowledging the deaths. My point, then, is not that the dog mourns the dead but, rather, that the presence of the dog might solicit such a response from spectators. Alternatively, a more literal reading of the dog's cursory inspection of the corpses, perhaps as meat for consumption, might also work to solicit acknowledgement of the deaths by drawing attention to the alienation of the corpses from the community that they once inhabited. Further, the inscrutability of the dog's whining, which resists signification in human terms, despite efforts to read it anthropomorphically, offers a model of sorts for the failure of language to account

for the carnage; and in this wordless void, the work of acknowledgement and perhaps mourning might begin, displaced onto the film's spectators, even as they may, of course, resist or negate this opportunity. Whereas the violence accorded women is presented as spectacle, without concomitant opportunities to acknowledge and mourn their deaths within the diegesis, the film's final sequence works to reify Giovanni's body in quasi-religious and erotic terms. Importantly, his death provides the opportunity, even if briefly and with qualifications, for mourning within the diegesis.

**“Don't shut your eyes; look for the last time”**

In the film's final sequences, Giovanni is accorded not one death, but two. The first occurs at the hand of Soranzo who stabs Giovanni first in the stomach and then through the heart to impale him on the spike-clad wall of the antechamber. The second takes place in the stables; in another of Griffi's directional interventions, Giovanni's naked body is carried aloft by four men and then executed in front of Soranzo, the assembled men and Bonaventura who has returned to intercede on behalf of his friend. The careful and controlled display of Giovanni's body and the ritual of the execution reinstitute the atmosphere of restraint and decorum that the massacre destabilized, marking differences between the deaths in sharply gendered and eroticized terms. Distinct from the deaths of the women, this sequence is notable for the degree of attention that the characters give Giovanni and which spectators are also invited to give him but also for the way in which that attention is oriented. The camera registers the sustained image of Giovanni's impaled body for some 67 seconds; it closes in and moves out, as if following Soranzo's lines of sight, until Giovanni's head falls forward and blood spills from his lips. The focus on Giovanni is increased in the film's final sequence. Here the film cuts away from Annabella's barely acknowledged body to the sight of Giovanni's body being carried aloft through the stables by four men, who are stripped to the waist, their well-defined torsos visible to the spectator. Giovanni's body is exposed, his arms held at ninety degrees from his body such that he forms the figure of a cross, presented for inspection both within the diegesis and to the viewer of the film.

The display of Giovanni's wounded body, which draws on Christian iconography (the position of the head, the wound to the stomach, the shape of the cross), locates him in terms of Christian martyrdom. These images of martyrdom are also eroticized through homoerotic relations of looking as Giovanni is tended by semi-naked men, including the bare-

ched executioner who appears as a prototype of sorts for the sexy figure of the executioner in Derek Jarman's *Edward II* (1991), who becomes at once Edward's lover and executioner. Griffi's film is not isolated in this respect as the history of appropriation of Saint Sebastian as a gay icon, exemplified by Jarman's *Sebastiane* (1976), attests. In *'Tis Pity* the eroticization of Giovanni's death through homoerotic relations of looking and codes works to queer the act of mourning both within the diegesis and for the spectator, as the gaze is relayed through the male characters. The challenge to normative structures of desire that Giovanni and Annabella's incestuous relationship offers, coupled with the presentation of Soranzo and Annabella's marriage as what Aebischer describes as "out of kilter" (120), embodied by the rotation of the image of their sex scene by ninety degrees, is extended by the eroticization of Giovanni's death within the context of a community of men.

Further, in the focus on Giovanni, the play's narratives of desire between Annabella, Giovanni, and Soranzo, and its focus on the death and punishment of Annabella are sidelined. Indeed, even the Cardinal's vicious rhetorical question that ends the play—"Who could not say, *'Tis pity she's a whore?*" (5.6.159)—occurs, with "could" substituted for "would," earlier in Griffi's film. But even as the film spares Annabella this final judgment it denies her, as the play does, a community of mourners. Spectators, too, are asked to orient their gaze through the male characters who look only at men, further restricting opportunities for engaging with the deaths of the women. Instead the closing sequences work to cement relations between men, especially the bonds of friendship between Giovanni and Bonaventura, which the film works to privilege in its final sequences.

The reappearance of Bonaventura thus provides the central mechanism through which the death of Giovanni might be acknowledged and mourned. In this sequence Bonaventura stands as the human equivalent of the dog. As the executioner prepares to complete his task, Bonaventura enters the scene and implores Soranzo to "stop this, stop him [. . .] the three of us were friends." Soranzo responds: "don't remind me of that [. . .] Don't shut your eyes; look for the last time at your incestuous friend. Watch. I shall scatter the pieces in the swamp where oblivion will claim them and only the wild dogs will relish his death." In his plea to Soranzo, Bonaventura attempts to reaffirm relations of friendship as a way to oppose further violence toward Giovanni, even if this injunction is ignored. In enjoining Bonaventura not to shut his eyes, Soranzo ensures that Giovanni's death is acknowledged, notwithstanding the fact that Soranzo envisages a swamp as the final resting place for Giovanni's

corpse, thus denying him proper burial rites. And in Bonaventura's apparent refusal of Soranzo's injunction not to pray for Giovanni—"Don't pray for him monk. It is useless. Your prayer might offend our Good Lord [ . . . ] Save them for worthier bastards"—the shots of the Friar's downcast eyes and kneeling body create a space within the diegesis for some measure of mourning for Giovanni. As the camera pulls back, the final sequence consists of Giovanni's body positioned horizontally on the table, Bonaventura kneeling and Soranzo standing, as the executioner's assistant shrouds Giovanni's head in a white cloth and the executioner swings his axe. The punishment of Giovanni thus takes place in the context of a human community, of which at least one member attempts to mitigate the punishment and to mourn him through prayer. Strikingly, Bonaventura had rejected Giovanni's demands for recognition earlier in the film, refusing to sanction his relationship with Annabella. This is shown most pointedly in the sequence when Giovanni gallops after Bonaventura and repeatedly throws sand in his face to no avail; the Friar excludes himself from the community and his friend by walking away. In the film's final sequence Bonaventura returns to his community; the recognition that Giovanni sought from Bonaventura earlier in the film is finally given, but now in the context of mourning.

### Sexing death

In this discussion I have attempted to show how Griffi's film presents the deadly consequences of desire in starkly gendered terms such that the film might be said to "sex death." I have suggested that the deaths of women are offered as spectacles for cinematic consumption but that the film affords very little space either for sustained acknowledgement of these deaths or for remembrance and mourning. In its final sequences Griffi's film thus fails to offer what Solga might describe as "an ethical, feminist performance of violence against women in contemporary early modern theatre" and, I would add, film (179); the film turns women into spectacles only then to render them invisible and to exclude them from forms of mourning and community in sharp contrast to the death of Giovanni. But what the film does do through its juxtaposition of the "sexed" deaths is to create the opportunity for what Solga calls an "ethical reception" of violence by a "feminist spectator" (179), such that the gender inequalities that underpin the violence might be acknowledged and resisted by its spectators. While I am committed to this kind of reading practice, I am also aware that recreating scenes of violence for the reader

to introduce elements of a comparatively minor European art house film for discussion not only remakes these scenes in relation to my critical preoccupations but also runs the risk of fetishizing the violence through the mode of description. Although cinematic spectatorship is, perhaps necessarily, structured around voyeurism and a fetishization of the image, I have tried to think about the issues at stake that emerge from watching and writing. In particular, by juxtaposing the scenes of violence with an analysis of the kinds of spectatorship that the film might afford I have sought to acknowledge and critique the gender politics of violence, death, and mourning that the film offers.

It is also worth remembering that while the film and my analysis suggest possibilities for ethical feminist responses to violence, spectators might refuse or ignore the opportunity to be ethical witnesses to violence and death (or even to acknowledge the existence of such a position), their responses variously conditioned by the contexts in which the film was produced and circulated. Thus the marketing of the film in the context of 1970s art house cinema, where Griffi is described in the press book as “recognis[ing] the actual meaning of the tragedy of these characters [. . . and] the obstinacy to stick to one’s ideas, regardless of what it costs,” is perhaps more likely to facilitate the kind of reading I have suggested here through its appeal to tragedy and, by implication, death and mourning. This is in contrast to the marketing of the film in the more salacious contexts of exploitation, horror, and sleaze cinema, which *Redemption* trades on, exemplified by an advertisement for the list featuring *'Tis Pity* in a 1993 issue of *Sight and Sound* magazine, which reads “Dedicated to the macabre, depraved world of the bizarre, *Redemption Films* brings you a cocktail of horror, passion and extreme decadence on video . . . Corrupt yourself now!” (n.p. ellipsis in original). The advertisement drives the spectator toward a condition of pleasure or perhaps even black humor in relation to violence, even as this might be refused just as mourning might be, or even attached to acts of mourning. My hope is that watching Griffi’s film, or indeed other performances of violence (early modern or otherwise), in the context of a reading such as this might provide ground for a critique of narratives of death and mourning, especially in relation to gender politics. In so doing it might afford possibilities for acknowledging the deaths of those who tend to be elided from official narratives of mourning, even in cases where performance works to occlude this critique and acknowledgment.

### Notes

This article has benefitted significantly from comments I received from members of the ISA Seminar "Counter-Shakespeares: Performing the 'Jacobean' Today" (Prague, 2011), especially the seminar leaders Pascale Aebischer, Roberta Barker and Kathryn Prince and respondents Richard Burt and Kim Solga. I am also grateful to Lisa Hopkins and Rowlie Wymer for providing me with the Redemption sleeve and VHS respectively, and to Julia Cort.

<sup>1</sup>All references to *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* are to Derek Roper's edition.

<sup>2</sup>The details of each release of Griffi's *'Tis Pity* are difficult to establish with respect to date, running time and language, as evidenced by slight (and sometime significant) variations in these details in reviews and critical responses to the film. Redemption Films's 1993 VHS version is approximately 4 minutes shorter than the 1973 Miracle Films release. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) certificate accounts for this discrepancy by noting that when films are transferred from film to VHS they shrink by approximately 4%. It is likely, therefore, that the Redemption version closely approximates the Miracle Films release, which is not commercially available at present. The 2006 New Star Video DVD is some 9 minutes shorter than the Redemption release and the image has been adjusted for television from the original widescreen aspect.

<sup>3</sup>See Warren and Wilkinson for overviews of the production history of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* on stage and screen.

<sup>4</sup>Several commentators have suggested that Ford's play was translated into Italian and then translated into modern English (see Bilbow 12; Hopkins 60; Rayns 187; Wilkinson 48).

<sup>5</sup>Originally X films were only to be exhibited to persons aged 16 years and older; in 1970 the age restriction for X films was raised from 16 to 18 years. The classification of Redemption Films's VHS release of *'Tis Pity* with 15 makes use of the BBFC's introduction in 1982 of the new categories of PG (Parental Guidance), 15, 18, R18.

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