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Misogyny in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

In John Ford's play, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, not one of the main characters receives what is typically considered a "happy ending." While both men and women are faced with their fair share of sorrows, the sorrows dealt to the male characters seem tame when compared against the tribulations of their female counterparts. Of these women, the treatment of the young maiden, Annabella, is the most severe. Throughout the play, she is forced into an incestuous relationship, becomes pregnant, and is told she must marry a man she does not love, before dying at the hand of her jealous brother. Further, the men in her life seem to regard her situation from a position of apathy. When this fails, and they are forced into contact with Annabella's tragic existence, they attempt to place blame unto her rather than accepting responsibility for her condition. With this knowledge, the play can be read through a lens that seeks to acknowledge its misogynistic undertone. While this tone is pervasive throughout the play, it is perhaps best explored through a series of character studies, focusing primarily on Annabella and her interactions with three male characters in the play: Giovanni, the Friar, and the Cardinal.

Giovanni, Annabella's brother, is one of the most misogynistic characters in the play. From the start of their relationship, his actions are primarily motivated by a certain selfishness, focusing exclusively on his wants and needs. After talking with the Friar to get the Church's opinion on his incestuous desire for Annabella, Giovanni muddles the

Friar's advice with vagaries when relating the conversation to her, stating: "I have asked counsel of the holy Church, / Who tells me I may love you, and 'tis just/ That since I may, I should; and will, yes will:/ Must I now live or die?" (I.ii 231-234). Giovanni blatantly lies to his sister in order to get the pleasure he so desires. The tension rises through his hyperbolic dramatization of the situation. Having supposedly gained the approval of the Church, Giovanni makes an appeal to Annabella's pathos, offering her a dagger and claiming that she should kill him if she refuses his love. By placing her in this scenario, Giovanni emotionally manipulates her, taking advantage of her good nature. He knows of how deeply she cares for him, and uses that to get what he wants from her. The passing of the dagger seeks to place blame for his turmoil on Annabella. The potential connotation of the dagger as a phallic symbol is also highlighted through the force with which it is given to her. In this moment, he foreshadows later actions in a dark and violent manner. While throughout this exchange, Giovanni acts as though he is in the right, there is a dissonance that arises when examining the uncertain, staggered quality of his dialogue: "That since I may, I should; and will, yes will." It seems that he is not entirely confident concerning whether or not he should commit to this new relationship. He acts to satisfy the sexual desires he possesses, showing his true insensible nature. The immense pressure now placed on Annabella in this scene shows how little Giovanni respects her, refusing to let her to make her own decision as a woman. By irrationally stating that he will kill himself if she denies him, her main focus now is saving her brother's life rather than examining her own desires and choices.

Giovanni continues this pattern of emotional manipulation as the play continues. Upon hearing that someone else will marry Annabella and, logically, be with her in a sexual sense, he flies into a jealous rage. In his fury, he concludes that the only way to prevent others from having his sister is to murder her. In the act, he exclaims, "Thus die, and die by me, and by my hand. / Revenge is mine; honour doth love command" (V.v 85-86). At this point, Giovanni's obsession with the lustful desires against her turns darker as he falls into an envious rage. The idea of losing his beloved makes him lose his sanity. In his final words to her, he makes the clarification not once, but twice that she is to die by his hand. He wants to claim ownership over her entire physical existence as controlling her love and affection is no longer enough. Here again, Giovanni's language is that of self-persuasion. Giovanni later remarks about his own death as a way to return to Annabella. He never truly mourns for her; rather, he uses her and her death to attain what he longs for. "Where'er I go, let me enjoy this grace, / Freely to view my Annabella's face" (V.vi 106-107). Giovanni dies with the illusory notion that he will be able to see his Annabella no matter where he is. It appears that he realizes that he has done some horrible things by stating the ambiguity of whether or not he will end up in Heaven or Hell, but does not state what he has done or why his treatment of Annabella was wrong. Giovanni never took the time to treat his sister as an actual person, but rather he considered her simply as an object of sexual desire, whose only purpose was his own satisfaction.

The Friar is another character who allows his misogynistic thinking to interfere with his duties as a member of the Church and as Annabella's confidant. When presented

with both Giovanni and Annabella's perspectives of their romantic engagement, he chooses to place blame on Annabella while seemingly absolving Giovanni. Upon witnessing Annabella's repentance for her misdeeds, the Friar replies to her: "How he will cry, 'O, would my wicked sister/ Had first been damned, when she did yield to lust'" (III.vi 29-30). Since the Friar knows Giovanni in a way that Annabella does not – they bonded while Giovanni was being educated – he should know that Annabella is not the one at fault here, and infer that Giovanni has manipulated both her and himself. However, instead the Friar postulates that, because Annabella is a woman, it is because of her that both her and her brother are engaging in their unholy relationship. She does not yield to lust, and yet the misogynistic mindset is so ingrained in the Friar's nature, that criticizing Annabella's sexual desires is his only course of action. If she is unable to calm these desires, it is considered vulgar and she is shamed. Due to the Friar's obsession with stereotypes concerning her gender, Giovanni's manipulation is completely cast aside. The Friar creates the metaphor of a dagger being pointed at her as the equivalent of each kiss bringing her closer to her death. This plays back on how Annabella and Giovanni's relationship was started as Giovanni thrusts his dagger at her asking her to kill him if she would not have him. The focus becomes her perceived lack of sexual restraint.

In his advice, the Friar offers the pragmatic solution of marrying another man, but neglects Annabella's personal desires. His advice to her is condescending, as he does not acknowledge Giovanni's possessive attitude toward her. "First, for your honour's safety, that you marry/ The Lord Soranzo; next, to save your soul, / Leave off this life, and henceforth live to him." (III.vi 36-38) Considering this line, it seems as if the Friar

does not view Annabella as a complicated being capable of autonomously rectifying her own situation. According to him, the only way for a woman to be happy is to be wed to a man and have him make the decisions. Giovanni has already stripped her sexual freedom, and through marriage, she would be involuntarily stripped of yet another opportunity to exercise control over her own fate. No matter what Annabella does, it seems she is always at fault and in need of correction.

As the Friar attempts to sympathize with Annabella, he comes off as condescending, asserting himself ironically as a knowledgeable man. "I know the baits of sin/ Are hard to leave" (III.vi 39-40). No one in this play understands that Annabella has been forced into this relationship. The Friar tries to make it seem like he knows everything and she knows nothing, but he is incorrect. While the Friar does know what it is like to leave sin, shown throughout his obvious devotion to the piety, he does not understand the issues Annabella is facing and does not take the time to try to understand her even more than anyone else does. Annabella is, in a sense, simply an opportunity for the Friar to flaunt his own perceived knowledge, and not a person to whom he may show thoughtful compassion and empathy. He cares more for how his advice is perceived rather than how it affects Annabella.

Considering his lofty religious position, the character of the Cardinal commands a great deal of power in the play. He originally arrives as a guest to the wedding of Annabella and Soranzo, and is quickly asked for his religious expertise concerning the series of accidental murders that occur throughout the course of the play. We may expect the perspective of a religious figure above that of the Friar to carry with it a certain

degree of righteousness unseen so far in the play's context. Perhaps, this is a character who will finally be able to decipher the complicated web of relationships and establish some just treatment for all involved. However, we are instead presented with another bumbling character who regards the situation with a distant, unserious tone. When asked to consider the situation, the Cardinal states, "Incest and murder have so strangely met. / Of one so young, so rich in Nature's store, / Who would not say, '*Tis pity she's a whore?*'" (V.vi 154-156) In this moment, all blame is put on Annabella. The title of the play is the Cardinal's last line and presumably this line is meant to be humorous.

However, it also shows a dark indifference to Annabella's misfortune. The Cardinal comments on the immoral nature of the incestuous relationship being strange because it was met with murder, instead of the fact that Annabella was forced into sin. He reflects on their youth and its connection to ignorance, but still places the blame largely on Annabella. While he does not explicitly condemn Giovanni for the fulfillment of his sexual desires, he does chastise and belittle Annabella for her participation, however unwilling.

Looking inward, it also becomes apparent that a male-dominated society has managed to alter Annabella's view of herself and her of relationships with men. Right before she dies, after being stabbed by her brother, she cries out: "Forgive him, Heaven" (V.v 92). The fact that Annabella repents for Giovanni before she dies is absurd, and shows the turmoil his emotional manipulation has caused. Her mind has been skewed by her need to save her brother from harm, since he keeps threatening to die if she does not comply with his wants. Even as she is slain, she puts Giovanni's fate before her own, and

fails to see why this method of thought is wrong. This is one of the bleakest moments of the play just because Annabella is the one putting herself down, even though she has done nothing wrong in her attempts to save her brother.

Misogyny is woven so tightly into the fabric of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* that the play must be viewed with a critical lens that acknowledges these tonal currents. Giovanni, the Cardinal, and the Friar are examples of misogynistic men in the play, but it does not end with them. Without realizing it, the women also act misogynistically toward themselves and place the men in their lives at the forefront of their prioritization. The character of Annabella deals with the most tragedy throughout the play. She loses her sense of self by being essentially assigned to a series of men, as well as the enduring constant emotional pressure from her brother. With these forces of misogyny surrounding her, she has no choice but to adhere to them. She is never given the opportunity to exhibit autonomy. The lack of understanding from the remaining characters towards Annabella shows the true misogyny that informs the actions and thoughts of both men and women within the play, as she is not granted even a chance of redemption, and concludes the play branded a whore.

Works Cited

Ford, John. *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1966. Print.