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Résumé de l'article

Dans cet article, l'auteur développe et appuie la revendication d'originalité de Margaret Cavendish. L'auteur présente *The Unnatural Tragedy* (1662), une relecture de *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633), comme faisant partie de la tradition des femmes écrivaines dans laquelle deux textes sont publiés dans un seul volume : le premier créatif et le deuxième critique. L'analyse montre que la façon dont Cavendish utilise cette forme d'appropriation rend *The Unnatural Tragedy* plus proche de ce que nous nommons une parodie, que de l'imitation propre à la Renaissance. L'auteur montre également que la pièce de Cavendish porte deux voix : une première critique et une deuxième qui rend hommage à la pièce de Ford. *The Unnatural Tragedy* de Cavendish traite de l'association que Ford fait entre le discours féminin et la transgression sexuelle dans *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633). Simultanément, la pièce de Cavendish est un hommage à la tentative de Ford de remettre en question l'idéologie d'un genre dans lequel les notions d'amour romantique et d'honneur masculin sont privilégiées. Dans sa pièce, Cavendish retravaille celle de Ford afin de déstabiliser à la fois la tragédie et ce qu'elle représente dans la société patriarcale de Cavendish, et ce faisant, s'adresse simultanément à Aristote et Ford.

# Re-Reading John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Re-Writing Tragedy: Margaret Cavendish's *The Unnatural Tragedy*

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Silence is the adornment of women. Sophocles said so, and Aristotle repeated it.

- Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*

**L**acking a classical education and speaking no foreign language, Margaret Cavendish was excluded as a writer from imitating the Greek and Roman

masters during a period when the imitation of such models was, as Thomas M. Greene writes, “central and pervasive,” a “precept and an activity which [...] embraced not only literature but pedagogy, grammar, rhetoric, esthetics, the visual arts, music, historiography, politics, and philosophy.”<sup>1</sup> Cavendish was acutely aware of her position outside the hegemonic male discourses of her day. In the poem that prefaces her *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (1662), she writes that her “Playes” are not “such as have been writ” by men like “*Johnson, Shakespear, Beaumont, Fletcher.*” Her “Playes [...] want their Learning, Reading, Language, Wit,” because the “Latin phrases [she] could never tell,” and the “Greek, Latin poets, [she] could never read,/ Nor their Historians.”<sup>2</sup> During what Greene describes as “an era of imitation,” it was not for Cavendish “to be able to convert the substance or riches,” as Ben Jonson puts it, of the classical poets to her “own use” through imitation.<sup>3</sup>

It was, however, for Cavendish to turn her exclusion into an advantage, which she did by simultaneously attacking imitation and celebrating her own originality. As Stephen Orgel shows in a discussion of Dryden’s response to Jonson’s borrowings, by the 1660s literary imitation was no longer accepted unreservedly, as it had been in the early years of the seventeenth century: “translation, imitation, borrowing” had become, at least to some, “‘learned plagiarism,’ ‘robbery,’ ‘theft.’”<sup>4</sup> Certainly this is the case with Cavendish, who links imitation with plagiarism in works such as “Of Poets and their Theft,” where she claims that “*Fancies, in the Braine that Nature wrought,/ Are best; what Imitation makes, are naught;*”<sup>5</sup> and in *The Comical Hash*, where, during a discussion between two gentlemen of Monsieur Theft’s book of poetry, the second gentleman insists that Imitators only copy the work of others and so “do not gain so much honour to themselves, as they give honour to those they imitate.” A poet such as Homer who is imitated by another is “as Nature, or the Gods” and creates “the Original,” whereas the “Imitator is but an Artificer.”<sup>6</sup>

Cavendish clearly wanted others to view her as an “Original Author.” In many of her works, she declares her originality and distinguishes herself from those “Poet-Juglers” who steal plots from others.<sup>7</sup> A “true Poet,” exclaims Cavendish in *The World’s Olio*, is “like a Spider that spins all out of her own bowels.”<sup>8</sup> Writing *Poetry*, she claims in the dedication to *Poems and Phancies*, “is the *Spinning* with the *braine*.” “All my Playes Plots,” she insists in the poem that prefaces her *Playes*, “my own poor brain did make:/ From Plutarchs story

I ne'r took a Plot/ Nor from Romances, nor from Don Quixot,/ As others have, for to assist their Wit,/ But I upon my own Foundation writ."<sup>9</sup> And in her *Life of William Cavendish*, Margaret Cavendish responds to those who had raised questions about the originality of her works by insisting that she is "the true and onley Authoress of them," and that she has been assisted in her writing only by her "own Thoughts, Fancies, and Speculations."<sup>10</sup>

Cavendish's declarations of her own originality have been problematic for many commentators. For even if Cavendish did not take her plots from "Plutarchs story" or from "Don Quixot," did not simply echo Hobbes and Descartes in her philosophic and scientific writing, she clearly borrowed from Shakespeare and other early modern writers in writing many of her plays, and from Francis Bacon and others in writing *The Blazing World*.<sup>11</sup> At least where her creative writing is concerned, Cavendish did not always preserve herself, to rephrase a statement that her contemporary Walter Charleton made in defense of her originality, "so free from the Contagion of Books."<sup>12</sup>

So why does Cavendish go to such lengths to assert her originality? One answer to this question is provided by Laura J. Rosenthal, who argues convincingly that whether a writer's work was viewed positively as imitation or negatively as plagiarism often had more to do with the gender and social status of the writer than with the work itself. Women and "Grub Street professionals" were "more vulnerable to the charge of plagiarism" than were educated male poets of the period. In early modern England, "difference" was regularly located "in the position of the author rather than in the activity of rewriting itself." And Cavendish's assertions about her originality, claims to being the "onley Authoress" of her works, and condemnations of plagiarism show that Cavendish fully understood "the differing social capacities to possess writing." Confronted with "unequal access to literary culture, the duchess insists upon her own originality," writes Rosenthal, "as a strategy for constructing full social subjectivity."<sup>13</sup>

Another answer is that Cavendish *was* original in many respects, something she seems to have recognized. To give one example, despite the fact that her plays make use of the works of Shakespeare and others, Cavendish's condemnation of imitation and insistence on the value of originality is unusual for the mid-seventeenth century. Orgel claims that "the morality of literary imitation" only starts to be questioned "after the Renaissance," and that in the 1760s "we are still very far from the moment when a writer's originality was the measure of his value."<sup>14</sup> And Rosenthal suggests that since "traditional histories

of criticism [...] locate the emergence of originality as an aesthetic value in the mid-eighteenth century,” Cavendish’s proclamation of the value of originality is about 100 years ahead of its time.<sup>15</sup>

Cavendish is also ahead of her time with her critical response to Shakespeare in her *Sociable Letters*, where Cavendish produced, as Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts write in their introduction to *Women Reading Shakespeare, 1660–1900*, “the first critical essay ever to be published on Shakespeare.”<sup>16</sup> In Letter CXXIII, Cavendish praises Shakespeare hugely: “indeed *Shakespear* had a Clear Judgment, a Quick Wit, a Spreading Fancy, a Subtil Observation, a Deep Apprehension, and a most Eloquent Elocution; truly, he was a Natural Orator, as well as a Natural Poet.” In addition, Cavendish discusses Shakespeare’s borrowings in her letter, how he “was forced to take some of his Plots out of History.”<sup>17</sup> In short, not only did Cavendish publish the first critical essay on Shakespeare, but in her letter she makes it clear that she is aware of Shakespeare’s borrowings about 30 years before these “first began to come to critical attention,” according to Orgel, “in 1691, with Gerard Langbaine’s *Account of the English Dramatick Poets*.”<sup>18</sup>

However, what is even more significant about Cavendish’s discussion of Shakespeare in her letter is her assertion that although he took “some of his Plots out of History,” Shakespeare “only took the Bare Designs, the Wit and Language being all his own.” Despite his borrowings, “so much he had above others, that those, who Writ after him, were Forced to Borrow of him.” Shakespeare may borrow “some of his Plots,” Cavendish suggests, but he is a “Natural Poet,” who can claim originality.<sup>19</sup> To borrow the language of the second gentleman in *The Comic Hash*, Shakespeare is not an “Imitator” or an “Artificer”; he is an “Original Author,” a “Creator,” one of those “few Poets that have such powers and parts to make a perfect Creature, which is a perfect work.”<sup>20</sup> Or as Cavendish says in Letter CXXIII, “*Shakespear* did not want Wit, to Express to the Life all sorts of Persons of what Quality, Profession, Degree, Breeding, or Birth soever.” Even his women are lifelike, says Cavendish, “for who could Describe *Cleopatra* Better than he hath done, and many other Females of his own Creating.”<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, Cavendish is not willing to admit that Shakespeare is other than an “Original Author,” or that in his plays he is engaged simply in imitation, an activity Cavendish conflates with stealing.<sup>22</sup> Clearly also, Cavendish draws a distinction between imitation, the practice of copying or quoting from the work of another, and what Shakespeare does, which starts with borrowing

“some of his Plots” or “the Bare Designs” of his plays from others, but ends with a work that is “all his own.” Cavendish recognizes, in effect, that for Shakespeare imitation is only, to borrow a phrase from Barbara Godard, “a way station on the road to originality.”<sup>23</sup> And it seems to me that Cavendish, who also borrowed from others, and who staked her own claim to originality, would have identified with Shakespeare, a writer whom she viewed as, like herself, excluded from the practice of imitation due to the lack of a classical education. In “Cavendish’s lexicon,” as Lisa T. Sarasohn writes in *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, “natural is better than artificial, and consequently an unlettered woman is the best kind of natural philosopher.” By extension, therefore, an unlettered man would be the best kind of natural poet.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Cavendish might well have understood Shakespeare’s exclusion as a blessing, and how “the want of what is called the advantage of a learned education,” as Richard Farmer suggests in *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* (1767), could result in “the felicity of freedom from the bondage of classical superstition.”<sup>25</sup> Or, to paraphrase Orgel’s interpretation of Farmer’s comment, Cavendish might well have grasped how the “need to plagiarize” became “an index to Shakespeare’s originality.”<sup>26</sup>

For it seems to me that Cavendish’s own lack of a classical education produces for Cavendish what could be termed a “felicity of freedom.” The imitation of classical models not being an option, Cavendish engages in her own form of appropriation, freely borrowing from or re-working early modern texts, Shakespeare’s included—and the result is an original and intelligent body of creative work that serves to offer both critical commentary on the texts from which she borrows and a reassessment of her own culture.<sup>27</sup> Marilyn L. Williamson is wrong to label Cavendish “Mad Madge, a deviant who has no heirs,”<sup>28</sup> because her plays, in their rethinking and rewriting of some of the narratives of her culture, articulate both a deconstructive and a constructive agenda, or what Sandra Gilbert has termed “the revisionary imperative.”<sup>29</sup> And with this articulation Cavendish situates herself as the foremother of those women writers following her who regularly offer in a single volume two texts: one creative, the other critical, women writers whose fictions raise, to borrow a phrase from Godard, “theoretical issues.”<sup>30</sup> These writers include Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose *Aurora Leigh* is both a novel and a work of aesthetics, and Virginia Woolf, whose *The Waves* takes on both the canon and imperialism,<sup>31</sup> and who, in her crafting of “a new form for a new novel,”<sup>32</sup> owes

a great debt, as Lise Mae Schlosser convincingly argues, to “Cavendish’s bold undermining of generic conventions in her 1662 *Playes*.”<sup>33</sup> They also include more recent writers such as the feminists writing in Québec during the 1970s who announced that they had created, in the words of Gail Scott, a “new genre” called “fiction theory” that challenges the distinction between fiction and theory, between creative and critical work.<sup>34</sup>

Cavendish’s heirs, in short, include all those women writers who came after Cavendish whose theorizing has resisted the rigid assumptions and precepts of traditional literary criticism, including generic classification; all those women whose theorizing, to borrow again from Godard, has “appear[ed] as / in fiction.”<sup>35</sup> More importantly for the purpose of this paper, her heirs include all those women writers whose theorizing has appeared as / in drama. For Cavendish’s *The Unnatural Tragedy* (1662), an adaptation of John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1633), offers both a creative and a critical text.<sup>36</sup> It is not only fiction theorists like Woolf, then, who are indebted to Cavendish, but also those feminist playwrights, or drama theorists, who since Cavendish have re-worked the plays of Shakespeare and other canonical tragedians to at once produce new plays *and* raise serious questions about their patriarchal societies and about tragedy itself.<sup>37</sup>

With her adaptation of Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, Cavendish demonstrates that she had good cause to proclaim her own originality. *The Unnatural Tragedy* represents one of the earliest examples in English—if not the earliest—of dramatic re-vision of canonical tragedy by a woman.<sup>38</sup> Further, the form of appropriation Cavendish employs in *The Unnatural Tragedy* is essentially the same form used by many contemporary feminist playwrights in their revisions of canonical tragedy, a form that is closer to what we understand today as parody than it is to Renaissance imitation, a form that, as Linda Hutcheon says of parody, “marks the intersection of creation and re-creation, of invention and critique.”<sup>39</sup> Like imitation, *The Unnatural Tragedy* is double-voiced, functioning, as Greene remarks about imitation, to “mingle filial rejection with respect.”<sup>40</sup> But like parody, which Margaret Rose describes as “a form of ‘metaliterary’ criticism which is distinguished from other types of literary criticism by its presentation of an argument within the confines of fictional reference,” and which Hutcheon characterizes as “Renaissance imitation” with “the addition of an ironic and critical dimension of distancing,” *The Unnatural Tragedy* asks searching questions of, even as it pays tribute to, Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a*

Whore.<sup>41</sup> In *The Unnatural Tragedy*, Cavendish takes issue with Ford's association of female speech and sexual transgression in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore. At the same time, however, Cavendish's play celebrates Ford's attempt to challenge the ideology of a genre that links romantic love and death, and in which certain notions of male honour are privileged over all else. Extrapolating from some of the arguments against tragedy presented by Ford, Cavendish re-works 'Tis Pity She's a Whore in *The Unnatural Tragedy* to destabilize both tragedy and what it stands for in Cavendish's patriarchal society.<sup>42</sup>

Both Ford and Cavendish talk back to Aristotle in their plays. Ford's Annabella is an assertive woman who, much like Shakespeare's Desdemona, boldly resists patriarchal authority and the social conventions to form a union with the man she loves.<sup>43</sup> With Annabella, Ford challenges Aristotle, who in the *Poetics* describes the tragic hero as a man of "the nobler sort" and stresses that women, who are "inferior" to men, do not make ideal tragic heroes.<sup>44</sup> For even though Ford presents us with two possible tragic protagonists, Annabella and her brother, Giovanni, Annabella is arguably the tragic hero of this, in her words, "wretched woeful woman's tragedy" (5.1.8). Unlike his sister, who vows "Repentance"—having come to recognize that she must put an end to her incestuous relationship with her brother, must give up a life that will doom her to damnation (5.1.35–7)—Giovanni never achieves *anagnorisis*. Unlike Shakespeare's Othello, who before he dies realizes he was wrong to question Desdemona's virtue and to kill her, Giovanni never expresses remorse or accepts that he has done anything wrong in murdering his sister.

As Patti P. Gillespie shows, "the tradition of dramatic theories fully grounded in male culture and male presuppositions" that began with the Greeks did not end with the Greeks. Instead, "such presuppositions hardened during the Renaissance, when developing nations centralized political power and courts took an interest in governing art along with everything else" (123).<sup>45</sup> Sixteenth-century neo-Aristotelians, who read Aristotle "as if he were a kind of Ur-Horace," insisted on the principle of decorum, which "meant, among other things," says Gillespie, "that men should behave like men and women like women, in a culture ruled by men."<sup>46</sup> In such a culture, women's place was not to write tragedy, which "was considered to be a more public, and hence more masculine genre, than, for instance, the letter, the religious confession, or the maternal legacy."<sup>47</sup> Cavendish, however, thumbs her nose at this precept in her "Prologue" to *The Unnatural Tragedy*, with the following lines, written by



William Cavendish: "Our Poetress is confident, no Fears,/ Though 'gainst her Sex the Tragic Buskins wears."<sup>48</sup> She then goes on to challenge Aristotle's notion of the inferiority of womankind.<sup>49</sup>

According to Aristotle in *De Generatione Animalium*, man is the norm and woman is an incomplete or "mutilated male."<sup>50</sup> The male is "active and motive," the female is "passive and moved."<sup>51</sup> And, although women have souls, they are less spiritual than men: "femaleness" is material, "maleness" is spiritual.<sup>52</sup> Since she has less rational soul than man, explains Aristotle in the *Politics*, woman's "deliberative faculty" is "without authority." Whereas man's is the "virtue of the rational," hers is that "of the irrational part." The same applies to the moral virtues. Man, "the ruler," requires "moral virtue in perfection," but woman, "the subject," requires "only that measure of virtue" necessary for her to fulfil her duty, which is to obey man. Man is suited for rational and public activity, woman for physical and private activity. "If all classes must be deemed to have their special attributes," declares Aristotle, "as the poet says of women, 'Silence is a woman's glory,' but this is not equally the glory of man."<sup>53</sup>

In *The Unnatural Tragedy*, Aristotle's position is given voice by both the second gentleman and the Matron. Early in the play, the second gentleman tells the first gentleman that "Women are not capable of Reason [...] Because it is thought, or rather believ'd, that women have no rational souls, being created out of man, and not from Jove, as man was" (I.3). Later, he remarks to his friend that if women do have souls, "they are of a dwarfish kind" and that he would not "have a wife with masculine strength, for it seems preposterous to the softness and tenderness of their Sex." Finally, he explains that he "would have a Wife rather to have a listning Ear, than a talking Tongue; for by the Ear she may receive wise instructions [...] also to know my desires, as to obey my will" (IV. 29). As for the Matron, she regularly interrupts the Sociable Virgins with remarks like "women have no more capacity than what is as thin as a Cobweb-laun"; and it is not "fit for such young Ladies as you to talk of State-matters [...] your Discourses should be of Masks, Plays, and Balls, and such like Recreation, fit for your Youth and Beauties" (II.10).

With these two, Cavendish's play would appear to support, not subvert, Aristotle. However, *The Unnatural Tragedy* counters the second gentleman and the Matron, not only with the first gentleman, who appears to admire women and insists that the Sociable Virgins have both "voluble tongues, and quick Wits" (I.3), but with the Sociable Virgins themselves. For these wise and

virtuous young women meet publicly “every day to discourse and talk” about “every body, and of every thing” (I.3), about subjects ranging from “State-matters” (II.10) to “Oration” (II.13) to the treatment of women in their society. Further, many of their exchanges are astute. For instance, they insist that what “makes married wives so sad and melancholy” is that after they marry “they keep no other company but their Husbands” (I.7).<sup>54</sup> And in a debate about historiography, they question the motives of those male historians, those “Chronologers,” who “not only new dress truth, but falsifie her,” writing “not only partially, but falsly” (II.13). With the Sociable Virgins, Cavendish goes a long way to undermining Aristotle’s and her society’s belief that women’s “deliberative faculty” is without power and silence her “glory.” At the same time, she undermines Ford’s affirmation in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* of his society’s “conventional tragic association,” as Margu rite Corporaal phrases it, “of female utterance with sexual lasciviousness.”<sup>55</sup>

Cavendish undermines this association of loose tongue and loose virtue, but not by presenting only virtuous vocal women in her play. In *The Unnatural Tragedy*, as Lisa Hopkins points out, “not all women are the same,”<sup>56</sup> and neither are all men, I would add, a fact that is underscored by the following exchange between the Sociable Virgins and the Matron:

4 *Virgin*. Why we [women] are not Fools, we are capable of Knowledge, we only want Experience and Education, to make us as wise as men.

*Matron*. But women are uncapable of publick Employments.

1 *Virgin*. Some, we grant are, so are some men: for some are neither made by Heaven, Nature, nor Education, fit to be States-men. (II.10)

Moreover, just as not all women or men are fit for “publick Employments,” not all women who are outspoken are wanton. Some, like the Sociable Virgins, are virtuous women, and some, like Madam Malateste, a former Sociable Virgin, are disreputable women. The point is that there is no necessary connection between female utterance and female virtue.

According to Corporaal, the message of Cavendish’s play is the opposite of that of the many Jacobean tragedies, including Ford’s, that suggest that assertion of her voice leads to a woman’s downfall. In *The Unnatural Tragedy*, says Corporaal, “a woman’s silence leads to her disempowerment and victimisation, whereas wit and self-assertion result in a woman’s control over her fate.”<sup>57</sup> And

there is some truth to this claim. For Madam Bonit, the first wife of Monsieur Malateste, was “a virtuous and kind woman” (V.47) with a “quiet obedient nature” (IV.30), a “good Wife” (V.38)—and her husband took full advantage of this, “making her,” in his words, “a slave unto [his] whore and frowns” (V.45). By comparison, Monsieur Malateste’s second wife, who asserts herself and speaks her mind, proclaiming herself “no good Wife,” but one who will “follow [her] own humour” rather her husband’s (V.38), attains complete autonomy within her marriage. Determined that she will not stay in a “dull place” with a husband who “spends his time in sneaking after his Maids tails,” Madam Malateste moves to her own “fine house in the City” (V.36), where she spends her time socializing and “Dancing” (V.43), and is “never without her Gallants,” giving the servants “cause to think” that she “cuckold[s]” her husband (V.41).

However, I do not think that what is going on in *The Unnatural Tragedy* is quite this simple. The character of Soeur exemplifies my point. Certainly, Soeur is a virtuous woman, “modest and honest” (II.12). But is she also a silent and submissive woman? And is it, as Corporaal suggests, “through her silence that Soeur loses control over her existence”?<sup>58</sup>

When Frere tells Soeur that he loves her as “Husbands love their Wives” and asks her to “lie” with him, Soeur retorts, “would you have me commit Incest?” and accuses him of being “possest with some straunge wicked spirit.” Frere tries to convince her with Machiavellian logic that she should “follow not those foolish binding Laws which frozen men have made [...] only to keep the ignorant vulgar sort in awe,” but Soeur will have none of it (IV.25).<sup>59</sup> When she next sees her brother, Frere has moved from logic to emotional blackmail, insisting that he will die if he cannot have her. Sounding like Isabella in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, Soeur tells him that it would be better for him to “die, and in the grave be laid, than live to damn [his] soul” by whoring his sister, cuckolding his brother-in-law, and dishonouring his father (IV.28).<sup>60</sup> Three scenes later, Frere continues to harass his sister—and Soeur decides that she has had enough. Realizing that her words are having no effect, Soeur says to her brother, “if you do persist, by Heaven I will discover your wicked desires, both to my Father and Husband” (V.31). Shortly thereafter, we see Soeur alone, agonizing over what she should do:

Shall I divulge my Brothers crimes, which are such Crimes as will set a mark of Infamy upon my Family and Race for ever? Or shall I let Vice

run without restraint? Or shall I prove false to my Husbands bed, to save my brothers life? Or shall I damn my Soul and his, to satisfie his wilde desires? O no, we both will die, to save our Souls, and keep our Honours clear. (V.33)

Before Soeur can get any further with her thoughts, however, Frere returns. Startled, Soeur asks, "Lord Brother, what is the reason you are come back so soon?" Frere retorts that he has "come to please [him] self" and carries his screaming sister off the stage (V.42).

In her scenes with her brother, Soeur is not a silent and submissive woman. She speaks her mind to him, making it clear that "if [her] life could ease [Frere's] grief, [she] willingly would yield it up to death" (IV.24), but that she will not damn her soul by yielding to his "wilde desires." When Frere persists in his pursuit of her, she threatens to expose him to her father and her husband, even though she is reluctant to "divulge [her] Brothers crimes," because she is "asham'd" to make his "faults" known (V.31). But before Soeur has any opportunity to speak out against him, she is raped by her brother. Two scenes later a "ravished" Soeur is killed by Frere, who then kills himself (V.44).<sup>61</sup>

In *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Ford challenges tragedy's obsession with certain notions of romantic love and male honour. Like the love of Romeo and Juliet, the love of Giovanni and Annabella is "star-crossed" and "death-marked."<sup>62</sup> Death and love walk hand-in-hand in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, right from the play's first scene, where Giovanni feels cursed by his love for his sister: "Lost! I am lost! [...] The more I strive, I love; the more I love,/ The less I hope. I see my ruin certain" (1.2.133–35). Unable to cure himself of his forbidden love, Giovanni is convinced that it is his "fate," not his "lust," that "leads" him to love his sister (1.2.203, 148). In the second scene, having accepted his fate, Giovanni tells Annabella that he has "suppressed the hidden flames" of his love for her for so long that they "almost have consumed" him, and that she "must either love" him, or he "must die" (1.2. 212–13). But Annabella, it turns out, has been suffering too, not because she loves her brother, but because she "durst not say [she] loved; nor scarcely think it" (1.2.234–41). Their mutual declaration of love is immediately followed by each demanding of the other, "Love me, or kill me" (1.2.245–50). Many scenes later, as Soranzo is threatening to kill her, Annabella sings, "What death is sweeter than to die for love" (4.3.59),<sup>63</sup> which encapsulates perfectly the "love-death embrace" of the tragic world.<sup>64</sup>

In the tragic world of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, male honour (which is heavily dependent on female reputation) takes precedence over love. In Giovanni's words, "honour doth love command" (5.5.84, 86). Thus, once Annabella, pregnant with her brother's child, marries Soranzo to preserve her reputation (4.3.23), Giovanni, feeling betrayed by the sister who had sworn that she would never be the wife of another (2.1.25–32), starts to unravel. During their final meeting, he goes so far as to accuse Annabella of proving "treacherous/ To [her] past vows and oaths" (5.5.3–4). Then, showing that he meant it when he said that before he would "endure" the "sight" of his sister "Clipped by another," he would "dare confusion" (4.1.16–17), Giovanni murders Annabella. He kills "a love for whose each drop of blood/ [he] would have pawned [his] heart" in order to "save [her] fame" (5.5.101–102, 84–86). In preventing Soranzo's "reaching plots" and presenting him with Annabella's heart before stabbing him, Giovanni wins "brave honour" (5.5.100, 5.6.74), but at what cost? Clearly, Ford's play, like Shakespeare's *Othello*—in which Othello claims that he is an "honourable murderer," because he did "naught [...] in hate, but all in honour"—challenges the equation of a certain code of male honour and destruction.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, it raises questions about tragedy's juxtaposition of romantic love and death.

There are no "star-crossed" lovers in Cavendish's *The Unnatural Tragedy*. Instead there is Soeur, who "never was wild or wanton," and who is married to "so worthy a person" that she would not "change him for all the World" (III.12). There is also Frere, a man who, having been away at school and travelling, has not seen his sister since he "was a little boy" (I.1), but who, nonetheless, tells her shortly after he meets her as an adult for the first time that he loves her "so well, and so much, as 'tis a torment to be out of [her] company" (III.12), and moans about "Loves raging fire that's in [his] heart" (III.21). Clearly, Frere's desire-at-first-sight for the sister whom he "resemble[s]" (I.5) is motivated by lust or self-love, not by love for his sister.<sup>66</sup>

The problem, however, is not Frere's physical desire for his sister, but that he cannot control that desire; that his "Affections," which are in conflict with his "Reason" and his "Conscience" (III.19, 16), come to dominate his behaviour. For as the second Sociable Virgin says, it "is easier to talk of [the Passions], than to conquer them and govern them, although it is easier to conquer the perturbed passions of the Mind, than the unruly Appetites of the Body" (III.15). At first, Frere struggles against the attempt of his "Affections" to "pull

down Reason from his throne, and banish Conscience from the Soul" (II.16). Tortured, he cries out, "O Gods, O Gods, you cruel Gods, commanding Nature to give us Appetites, then starve us with your Laws, decree our ruine and our fall, create us only to be tormented" (IV.24). Eventually, though, Frere accepts that "Affections [...] can neither be persuaded either from or to" by "Rhetorick" (iii.19) and gives in to them, telling Soeur that he "must enjoy [her]" and that if she will not "embrace [his] love with a free consent," he will "force [her] to it" (V.42).

While Cavendish's play, unlike Ford's, is not concerned with romantic love, *The Unnatural Tragedy*, like *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, does function to challenge the ideology of a genre in which certain notions of male honour, certain impulses of male possession, are privileged. Soeur is not raped and killed by her brother because she is or is not chaste, because she is or is not an assertive woman, but because Frere cannot escape the impulse to possess his sister. Like Ford's Giovanni and Shakespeare's Othello, Frere is a product of a society in which male anxiety about female autonomy leads to women being "inclos'd with locks and bolts" to keep them "honest," and to men who "are so jealous of their wives [that] they are jealous of their Brothers, Fathers, Sons" (II.12). Therefore, once Frere decides he must have his sister, he takes her. Having raped her, Frere realizes that there will be consequences, that he "must die" for what he has done. But he is not willing to go to his grave alone, because he cannot be "without [Soeur's] company, although in death," so he murders his sister. Once he has killed Soeur, Frere remarks that his "Mind is at rest," since he knows "none can enjoy her after [him]," and he falls on his sword (V.44). If Ford's Annabella dies because her brother's honour demands revenge, Cavendish's Soeur dies because of her brother's overwhelming desire to possess her and to prevent other men from doing the same.<sup>67</sup>

In conclusion, in *The Unnatural Tragedy*, in particular with the Sociable Virgins, Cavendish not only talks back to Aristotle, undermining Aristotle's ideas about the nature and role of women; she also undermines the conventional gender ideology of early modern tragedy that suggests that an outspoken and assertive woman is a woman lacking in virtue. As well, in showing how concern for her "Reputation" forces Madam Bonit to suffer the abuse of her husband "in silent misery" (II.14), and how a desire to "keep [their] Honours clear" causes Soeur to hesitate to make public her brother's behaviour, Cavendish demonstrates just how patriarchal culture's idealization of female

silence contributes to the downfall of these two woman.<sup>68</sup> Most importantly, by positioning *The Unnatural Tragedy* beside Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, by working with Ford's play, Cavendish makes it clear that in a patriarchal society that affirms an oppressive gender hierarchy, it makes little difference whether a woman is or is not assertive.<sup>69</sup> For in such a society, women likely will be doomed if they are assertive, doomed if they are not. Judged by the standards of her society, Cavendish's Soeur, who strongly resists the advances of her brother, is a submissive women, "always modest and honest," always concerned to adhere to the precepts of her religion (II.12; IV.25). Ford's Annabella, who dares to declare her love for her brother and to defy the mores of her society by engaging in an incestuous relationship with Giovanni, is quite the opposite. Yet both women end up dead, murdered by their brothers. What Ford's and Cavendish's plays together show is that the woman who conforms to her society's expectations of how a woman should behave is just as apt to come to a bad end as the woman who bucks those expectations. If, as the early modern theatre suggests, a man's worst nightmare in a patriarchal society is a woman who defies paternal authority—as Shakespeare's Desdemona does when she runs off with Othello and Ford's Annabella does when she chooses her brother over a conventional husband—a woman's worst nightmare, Cavendish's *The Unnatural Tragedy* insists, is to exist in a culture in which men view all women as chattel, theirs for the taking, not safe even from the impulses of control and possession of their "Brothers, Fathers, Sons."

Cavendish may not have read the Greek or Latin canon or the Continental romances, and may not, therefore, have been able to borrow her plots from writers such as Plutarch or Cervantes. She certainly had read John Ford and William Shakespeare, though, and in *The Unnatural Tragedy* she engages in her own form of appropriation, borrowing freely from Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and alluding to more than one of Shakespeare's plays. Despite her insistence in her writings that she is an original author, a "true Poet" who relies only on her "own poor brain" for her plots, and not one of those "Poet-Juglers" who steal or borrow material from others, Cavendish clearly was assisted in her writing of *The Unnatural Tragedy* by more than her "own Thoughts, Fancies, and Speculations." In some respects, then, with *The Unnatural Tragedy* Cavendish contradicts what she has said about her own originality. That being acknowledged, Cavendish *is* an original author, *The Unnatural Tragedy* is an original play, for, despite her borrowings, to apply what Cavendish said about

Shakespeare to Cavendish herself, the “Wit and Language” of *The Unnatural Tragedy* are all her own.<sup>70</sup> Cavendish reworks Ford not to repeat what he wrote, not to reinforce the message of his play, but rather to take issue with Ford’s association of female speech and sexual transgression in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, to enlist Ford in the service of her own message, and to celebrate Ford’s attempt in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* to raise questions about the ideology of tragedy. If Ford talks back to Aristotle in his play and challenges tragedy’s linking of romantic love and death, male honour and destruction, Cavendish talks back to both Aristotle and Ford in hers. In short, Cavendish’s originality is reflected in the way that she presents at once a creative text (a new play), and a critical text; in the way that her play carries on a dialogue with the texts of Ford and other writers; in the way that her play functions as both tribute to and critique of Ford’s play; and in the way that Cavendish offers within her creative text critical commentary on the texts from which she borrows, on her own patriarchal culture, and on tragedy itself.

### Notes

1. To clarify, my assumption is not that Cavendish, because she lacked a classical education, could not (or did not) “engage” with the Ancients, but that she would have felt prohibited from “imitating” them. In fact, one of the main claims I make in my essay is that with *The Unnatural Tragedy* Cavendish is talking back to Aristotle, which surely is a form of engagement. As Eileen O’Neill tells us, “unlike most of her male philosophical counterparts—and even a few women of the period [...]—Cavendish had received no formal training in Philosophy [...] and she had not been privately tutored in languages and the sciences [...] Cavendish never acquired the ability to read philosophical texts in any language than English.” Further, not being able to read Greek or Latin, when Cavendish “attempted to master” the Ancients she “turned to Thomas Stanley’s *The History of Philosophy* (1655–62), which provides paraphrases of the source material for reconstructing the views of the various ancient sects” (“Introduction,” Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O’Neill [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], pp. xii, cv). It seems to me, therefore, that Cavendish might well have felt excluded from imitating the Ancients. In fact, she says that her goal is to be a philosopher, not a scholar, as a “Scholar is to be lear-



ned in other mens opinions, inventions and actions, and a philosopher is to teach other men his opinions of nature” (“To The Reader,” *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* [London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655]). She then goes on to disparage imitation—and to engage with Aristotle and others in her own fashion.

Thomas Greene (*The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* [New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1982], p. 1) says also that “*imitatio* [...] determined for two or three centuries the character of most poetic intertextuality” and that the “specific imitative structures found in literary texts of the Renaissance serve both to distinguish it as a period and to align it in a long, disorderly history of western intertextuality.” Greene defines the Renaissance as roughly the period that starts with Petrarch, who was born in 1304, and ends with John Milton, who died in 1674 (pp. 2, 4).

2. Margaret Cavendish, *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London: A. Warren, for John Martyn, James Allestry, and Tho. Dicas, 1662), p. 4. While she lacked rhetorical training and a classical education, Cavendish was tutored with her sisters in “singing, dancing, playing on Musick, reading, writing, working, and the like” (“A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life,” *Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to the Life* [London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1656], pp. 370–371). As an adult, her learning continued informally. After marrying William Cavendish in Paris, in 1645, Margaret learned about philosophy and science from her husband and his brother.
3. Greene, p. 1. See Ben Jonson, *Timber or Discoveries*, in *Ben Jonson*, XI, ed. Percy Simpson (Oxford, 1952), pp. 563–649, lines 2466–71. Jonson was quoted by Stephen Orgel in “The Renaissance Artist as Plagiarist,” *ELH* 48, No. 3 (Autumn 1981), pp. 476–95, where Orgel points out that this line is from a passage that Jonson “translated verbatim from a treatise by Joannes Buchler on the reformation of poetry published in 1633” (484).
4. Orgel, pp. 482–83. Orgel takes the term “learned plagiarism” from Dryden, who uses it to refer to “Jonson’s borrowings.”
5. Margaret Cavendish, *Poems and Phancies Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle, The Second Impression, much Altered and Corrected* (London: William Wilson, 1664), p. 152.
6. Cavendish, *Playes* (1662), p. 561. Cavendish’s remark about imitators “giv[ing] honor to those they imitate” makes me think of what Linda Hutcheon says about parody, which Hutcheon sees as being characterized by a “combination of respectful

homage and ironically thumbed nose" (*A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* [New York & London: Methuen, 1985], p. 33).

7. In "Upon the Same Subject," Cavendish refers to writers who steal from Horace and other classical writers as "Poet-Juglers" and insists that they "should by th' Poets Laws be Hang'd, and so/ "Into the Hell of Condemnation go" (*Poems and Phancies*, p. 153).
8. Margaret Cavendish, *The Worlds Olio, Written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle* (London: Martin and Allestrye, 1655), p. 6. Jonathan Swift used the same spider image in *The Battle of the Books* (1704), nearly half a century after Cavendish used it. However, as Laura J. Rosenthal points out, where Cavendish preferred the spider, Swift "preferred the bee-like ancients who gathered material to produce sweetness and light to the spidery moderns who produced from the materials of their own bodies" (*Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England: Gender, Authorship, Literary Property* [Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996], p. 63). Sylvia Bowerbank, in an earlier essay, noted that Cavendish "favors imagery of silkworm, spider, and spinning for depicting literary creativity, particularly hers," and commented that Cavendish's "is the mentality which is the target" of Swift's book, with its "famous confrontation between the bee and the spider, the ancient and the modern respectively" ("The Spider's Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the 'Female' Imagination," *English Literary Renaissance* 14, No. 3 [Autumn 1984], pp. 397, 396).
9. Cavendish, *Playes* (1662), p. 4.
10. Margaret Cavendish, *The Life of the Thrice Noble, High, and Puissant Prince William Cavendishe, Duke, Marquess, and Earl of Newcastle*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: A. Maxwell, 1675), dedication. Cavendish seems to contradict her claims to originality in the dedication of *The World's Olio*, which is to her husband, and in the poem that concludes *Poems and Phancies*, where she writes that she is "neither Born nor Bred" a poet, but "to a Witty Poet Married/ Whose Brain is Fresh, and Pleasant, as the Spring,/ Where Fancies grow, and where the Muses sing," and that, having "no Garden of [her] own," she must "gather Flowers" in her husband's "Garden," to make "a Posie up in Verse" (pp. 298–99). "But if we understand authorship as property," says Rosenthal, there is no real contradiction here, as all the property of Margaret Cavendish "belongs to her through the privilege of her marriage to William.... The complexities and contradictions of Cavendish's authorial self-construction articulate an intricate personal and historical situation in which she found herself both privileged and disempowered" (pp. 71–72).

11. In the "Introduction" to *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2000), Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson write that in *The Blazing World* Cavendish "invents a world that functions as a brilliant critique of Bacon's *New Atlantis*" (p. 30). In a review of Marina Leslie's *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History*, Katherine Rowe asserts that in *The Blazing World* Cavendish "borrows strategically from Aesop, Spenser, More, Shakespeare, Bacon, and others," and suggests that "Leslie resolves its confusing generic shifts into intelligent, revisionist play with source." See *Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature* 1, No. 1 (Summer 1999), <http://www.brynmawr.edu/bmrc/rev9utopia.html> (accessed May 5, 2008).
12. Walter Charleton, *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle* (London, 1676), p. 146. Charleton is cited by Rosenthal, p. 58.
13. Rosenthal, pp. 12, 13, 59.
14. Orgel, p. 484.
15. Rosenthal, p. 64. Rosenthal cites here Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).
16. Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts, eds., *Women Reading Shakespeare, 1660–1900: An Anthology of Criticism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 12.
17. Margaret Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters, Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London, 1664), pp. 246, 247.
18. Orgel, pp. 483–84. Orgel comments that "Langbaine's interests were primarily antiquarian; he noted the sources for a number of Shakespearean plots. It was Pope who first uncovered the classical borrowings."
19. Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters*, pp. 247, 246.
20. Cavendish, *Playes* (1662), p. 561.
21. Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters*, p. 245, 246.
22. In "Upon the Same Subject," Cavendish uses the word "steal" with reference to those who borrow from "*Homer, Virgil, Ovid*" (*Poems and Phancies*, p. 153). In Letter CXXIII, Cavendish writes that "others of our Famous Poets have Borrow'd, or Stoln" from Shakespeare (*CCXI Sociable Letters*, p. 247).
23. Godard used this phrase in "Telling it Over Again: Atwood's Art of Parody," *Canadian Poetry* 21 (Fall/Winter 1987), <http://uwo.ca/english/canadianpoetry/cpjrnl/vol21/godard.htm> (accessed April 20, 2011). Godard's complete comment

was as follows: "For copying may be a method of learning: at certain times in the history of art and literature, imitation of, or quotation of classical models has been a highly approved method of instruction, young artists being encouraged to copy before looking to nature, or to themselves, for truth. Imitation is thus a way station on the road to originality, as Atwood recognized in instructing undergraduates to write pastiches of Shaw and Beckett."

24. Lisa T. Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 7. In Cavendish's own words, the "Artificial Arguments" of those natural philosophers who have received an education are "as Clouds which Obscure the Natural light of Information or Observation [...] and the best Natural Philosophers are those, that have the Clearest Natural Observation, and the Least Artificial Learning" (Preface to *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, 1663), n.p.
25. This comment from Richard Farmer's *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* (1767) is quoted by Orgel, p. 484.
26. Orgel, p. 484.
27. Of course, the sort of borrowing in which Cavendish engaged was viewed by many as an illegitimate form of appropriation. Cavendish deflects charges of plagiarism, however, by insisting that imitation of classical models is equivalent to stealing. While Cavendish's claim that imitation is a form of plagiarism is not original, her motivation for making such a claim may well be.
28. Marilyn L. Williamson, *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650–1750* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), p. 18.
29. Sandra Gilbert defines "the revisionary imperative" as the imperative to "review, reimagine, rethink, rewrite, revise, and reinterpret the events and documents that constitute" a writer's cultural history ("What Do Feminist Critics Want? A Postcard From the Volcano," *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter [New York: Pantheon Books, 1985], p. 32).
30. Barbara Godard, "Becoming My Hero, Becoming Myself: Notes Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," *Language in Her Eye: Views on Writing and Gender by Canadian Women Writing in English*, ed. Libby Scheier, Sarah Sheard, and Eleanor Wachtel (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1990), p. 119. Godard's remark was made about the genre she calls "fiction theory."
31. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* is a novel-in-verse, an epic, and a female bildungsroman. It is equally a philosophy of art, a work into which, to use Browning's own words, her "highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered"

- (*Aurora Leigh and Other Poems*, intro. Cora Kaplan [London: The Women's Press, 1978]), p. 37. And Woolf's *The Waves*, as Jane Marcus astutely remarks, "quotes (and misquotes) Shelley, not to praise him but to bury him. Woolf is infusing her discourse about Orientalism in England at the beginning of the postcolonial period with Shelley's Orientalism" ("Britannia Rules *The Waves*," *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century "British" Canons*, ed. Karen R. Lawrence [Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992]), p. 137.
32. As Schlosser reminds us, Woolf wrote in "her diary of 1920 that she had arrived 'at some idea of a new form for a new novel'" ("Mrs. Dalloway and the Duchess: Virginia Woolf Reads and Writes Margaret Cavendish," *Literature Compass* 5/2 [2008], pp. 353–361), p. 358.
  33. Schlosser, p. 353. In her excellent essay, Schlosser claims that "Margaret Cavendish's writing had a profound effect on Woolf's early writing" (p. 354) and situates Cavendish as a "foremother through whom Woolf learned to think *back* to a history of women's writing—and *forward* to a future of literary possibilities" (p. 360). Schlosser outlines parallels between Cavendish's reshaping of the generic conventions of drama and "Woolf's recrafting of the generic conventions of the novel in her 1925 *Mrs. Dalloway*," pointing out that "Woolf was writing about Cavendish as she composed *Mrs. Dalloway*" p. 353).
  34. Gail Scott, *Spaces Like Stairs* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1989), p. 47. Barbara Godard describes fiction theory as a "blend of critical analysis and creative writing" ("Critical Discourse in/on Quebec," in *Studies in Canadian Literature: Introductory and Critical Essays*, ed. Arnold E. Davidson [New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1990], p. 289). As Godard puts it, in fiction theory the "law of genre (of textual/sexual propriety) is violated [...] when theory scrambles over the slash to become fiction." ("Becoming My Hero," p. 119). Fiction theory points to both a re-evaluation and a re-writing of the traditional narratives of our culture, and its purpose is explicitly political. In Daphne Marlatt's words, fiction theory offers "a corrective lens which helps us see *through* the fictions we've been conditioned to take for the real [...] fiction *theory* deconstructs these fictions while *fiction* theory [...] offers a new angle on the 'real,' one that looks from inside out rather than outside in" (Marlatt, et al., "Theorizing Fiction Theory," *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 57 [1986], p. 9).
  35. Godard, "Becoming My Hero," p. 119.
  36. Margaret Cavendish, *The Unnatural Tragedy, Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London:

A. Warren, for John Martyn, James Allestry, and Tho. Dicas, 1662), pp. 323–67; John Ford, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, in *Six Renaissance Tragedies*, ed. Colin Gibson (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire & London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 429–94. Quotations from these two plays are hereafter cited in the text.

Both Cavendish's and Ford's plays draw on "the anonymous early Jacobean tragedy *The Fair Maid of Bristow*," according to Lisa Hopkins in "Crime and Context in *The Unnatural Tragedy*," *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Special Issue 14 (May 2004), 6.6, <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/si-14/hopkunna.html> (accessed May 15, 2007).

37. For me, the project of dramatic re-vision of canonical tragedy by feminist playwrights represents another manifestation of fiction theory, one where "women's theorizing appears as / in drama." The feminist re-visions that I have examined include the following plays, which rework the tragedies of Euripides and Shakespeare: Jackie Crossland's *Collateral Damage: The Tragedy of Medea* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1992); Dario Fo and Franca Rame's *Medea (Female Parts: One Woman Plays)* [London and Leichhardt, New South Wales: Pluto Press, 1981], pp. 36–40); Deborah Porter's *No More Medea (Theatrum)* [April/May, 1991], pp. S1–S7); Caryl Churchill and David Lan's *A Mouthful of Birds* (London: Methuen, 1986); Maureen Duffy's *Rites (New Short Plays: 2)* [London: Methuen, 1969], pp. 9–36); Alison Lyssa's *Pinball (Plays By Women, Volume Four, ed. Michelene Wandor)* [London: Methuen, 1984], pp. 120–59); The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters (Herstory: Volume 1, Plays By Women for Women, ed. Gabriele Griffin and Elaine Aston)* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991], pp. 19–69); Joan Ure's *Something in it for Cordelia (Joan Ure: Five Short Plays)* [Glasgow: Scottish Society of Playwrights, 1979], pp. 9–30); Margaret Clarke's *Gertrude & Ophelia (Theatrum)* [April/May 1993], pp. S1–S15); Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1990); and Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* (Winnipeg: Scirocco, 1997).

These feminist re-visions make it clear that there is a strong critical drive behind such re-vision. The feminist playwrights appear to have been drawn to the plays of Euripides and Shakespeare because these plays themselves act to destabilize tragedy and patriarchal ideology, providing for the feminist playwrights a foundation on which to build. Their quarrel is not with Euripides and Shakespeare, whom they enlist in the service of feminism, but with traditional interpretation, which has used the tragedies of Euripides and Shakespeare to sanction existing

gender and other hierarchies, interpretation which, as Adrienne Munich in “Notorious Signs, Feminist Criticism and Literary Tradition” puts it so well, “has tended to be more misogynist than the texts it examines” (*Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn [London & New York: Routledge, 1985], p. 251). It is also with tragedy itself, which, as constructed by theorists from Aristotle’s period to our own, has functioned to promote the values of an aristocratic and masculine elite.

38. The term “re-vision” is from Adrienne Rich, who in “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” (*Adrienne Rich’s Poetry*, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi [New York: W.W. Norton, 1975], pp. 90–98) defines “re-vision” as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (p. 90).
39. Hutcheon, p. 101.
40. Greene, p. 46.
41. Margaret Rose, “Defining Parody,” *Southern Review* XIII.1 (1980), p. 19; Hutcheon, p. 10. In other words, both imitation and parody are double-voiced and both involve borrowing. However, parody involves an irony that is lacking in imitation. Further, while parody begins with imitation, parody moves beyond imitation, moves beyond copying or quotation, to produce a work that is both an original creative work *and* a critical work that engages in a conversation with the work being parodied. In Hutcheon’s words, parody is “critical revision” of a “‘target’ text” and “a form of inter-art discourse” (pp. 15, 2), and parody should not be confused with satire, as, unlike satire, “parody’s ‘target’ text is always another work of art or, more generally, another form of coded discourse” (p. 16).
42. Like Ford’s play, which raises some serious questions, as Larry S. Champion has pointed out, about one of patriarchy’s institutions, the Church, “by the fact that the friar’s counsel has involved concealing [Annabella’s] pregnancy through a marriage of convenience and by the generally disreputable nature of the Cardinal’s actions in the name of the Church” (“Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* and the Jacobean Tragic Perspective,” *PMLA* 90.1 [1975], p. 79), Cavendish’s play is critical of patriarchal society. Cavendish, however, conflates the patriarchal authority of the state and the church, which is made clear when Frere tells his sister that the gods who made the laws that govern morality are “old men with long beards” (II.12), surely a reference to the patriarchy.
43. Raymond Powell suggests that Desdemona’s contracting of a “clandestine marriage with a black man” is an “affront to propriety and fatherly authority,” whereas

Annabella's decision to engage in an incestuous relationship with her brother is "a defiance of morality and religion" ("The Adaptation of a Shakespearean Genre: *Othello* and Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," *Renaissance Quarterly* 48, No. 3 [Autumn 1995], p. 588). It seems to me, however, that the actions of these two women are different only in degree. Both contract marriages with men deemed unsuitable by their societies (that Annabella sees her union with her brother as a marriage is made clear by the fact that she gives Giovanni the ring that her mother bequeathed her, the ring her mother "charged" her "not to give't/ To any but her husband" [2.6.36–38]), and in so doing both women challenge patriarchal authority.

44. Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature*, tr. Leon Golden, commentary by O.B. Hardison, Jr. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968) XV (1454a). Aristotle also comments in the *Poetics* that slaves, who are "completely ignoble," do not make ideal tragic heroes either (XV [1454a]) and that the tragic hero possesses good intentions and "falls into misfortune [not] through vice and depravity: but rather [...] through some miscalculation" (XIII [1453a]). In Ford's play, however, Annabella and Giovanni, based on the moral standards of their society, fall "through vice and depravity."
45. Patti P. Gillespie, "Feminist Theories of Theatre: Revolution or Revival?" *Theatre and Feminist Aesthetics*, ed. Karen Laughlin and Catherine Schuler (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1995), pp. 100–30. Gillespie cites Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theatre in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) and Guy Fitch Lyle and Stephen Orgel, eds., *Patronage in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) on the question of "the connection between art and power in the Renaissance" (p. 123, n. 12).
46. Gillespie, p. 105. The "Ur-Horace" phrase is used by Bernard Weinberg in "From Aristotle to Pseudo-Aristotle," *Aristotle's Poetics and English Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Elder Olson (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 200. Gillespie goes on to quote from Franciscus Robertellus, *On Comedy*: "To weave nicely, to embroider, to spin are commendable in a woman; these things ought not to be esteemed in a man. [...] If [strength of body] be attributed to a woman [or] if some poet or other portrays a woman in the same way Homer portrays Achilles, he would be severely censured" (p. 105).
47. Margu rite Corporaal, "Wicked Words, Virtuous Voices: The Reconstruction of Tragic Subjectivity by Renaissance and Early Restoration Women Dramatists" (PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2003), p. 9, <http://dissertations.ub.rug.nl/FILES/faculties/arts/2003/m.c.m.corporaal/c1.pdf> (accessed June 23, 2008). That



- notions about tragedy being a “masculine genre” did not change much between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries is supported by Voltaire’s remark that no woman has ever written a “tolerable tragedy” because “the composition of tragedy requires *testicles*.” This remark was quoted by Byron in a letter to John Murray, April 2, 1817, according to *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 3rd. ed., s.v. “Voltaire.”
48. Cavendish is not the first woman to don “the Tragic Buskins.” Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613) is both the first tragedy and the first original play written in English by a woman. As well, Jane Lumley (1537–1578) translated Euripides’ *Iphigeneia in Aulis* into English and Mary Sidney Herbert (1561–1621) translated Robert Garnier’s *Antoine* into English to produce *The Tragedy of Antonie*.
  49. Cavendish writes about Aristotle elsewhere in her work, often with a lack of reverence, as for example in *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* in a section entitled “On Aristotle’s Philosophical Principles,” where she observes that Aristotle “may justly be called the Idol of the Schools, for his doctrine is generally embraced with such reverence, as if Truth it self had declared it,” and then adds that Aristotle “is no less exempt from errors, then all the rest [the ancient Philosophers], though more happy in fame” (1666), n.p. And in *Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to the Life*, even while insisting that she does not “discommend Aristotle,” Cavendish seems to do just that when she remarks that Aristotle’s work “is onely what the vulgar Senses have brought in, not what the subtil Conceptions have found out; his Knowledge was got by untimely Deaths, and cruel Dissections, not by deep and serious Contemplations” (1656), n.p.
  50. Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium*, *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908–1931) II, 3 (737a).
  51. Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium* I, 21 (729).
  52. Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium* I, 20 (729a). Aristotle’s influence has been significant. “Aristotle’s definition of a female as a ‘mutilated male,’” Maryanne Cline Horowitz comments, was transmitted into biological, obstetrical, and theological tracts and continues to have authoritative influence through St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*.” This influence can be seen in Freud’s “theory of the female castration complex” (“Aristotle and Woman,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 9.2 [Fall 1976], pp. 184–85, n. 7). From Aristotle, explains Horowitz, “medieval thinkers learned to dismiss Plato’s radical theory of the common education of women and men for military, intellectual, and political leadership by scoffing at the accompanying ‘community of women and children.’” Further, “while upholders of many sides of the woman question have used the Bible to support their cause, it was a rare defender

of woman who managed to use Aristotle to bring credit to the female branch of the human race" (pp. 187–88).

53. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1973) I, 5 (1254b); I, 13 (1260a).
54. The observation of the Sociable Virgins that the plight of women is that once they marry they "keep no other company but their Husbands" is reminiscent of a speech made by Euripides' Medea. According to Medea, a woman can never know whether her husband will turn out to be a "good or bad one," and, if the former, then life is "envious." If the latter, then a woman would "rather die," because a woman's husband is her only company. In Medea's words to the Women of Corinth, "A man, when he's tired of the company in his home./ Goes out of the house and puts an end to his boredom/ And turns to a friend or companion of his own age./ But we are forced to keep our eyes on one alone" (*The Medea, Euripides I*, trans. Rex Warner, intro. Richard Lattimore [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955], ll. 236–47).
55. Marguérite Corporaal, "An Empowering Wit and an 'Unnatural' Tragedy: Margaret Cavendish's Representation of the Tragic Female Voice," *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Special Issue 14 (May 2004), 12.2, <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/si-14/cor-pempo.html> (accessed May 15, 2007).
56. Hopkins, 6.6.
57. Corporaal, "An Empowering Wit," 12.2.
58. Corporaal, "An Empowering Wit," 12.14.
59. In Ford's play, Giovanni uses similar Machiavellian logic. See, for example, Act 5, scene 3. Of course, Ford and Cavendish might have been influenced by Montaigne, not Machiavelli, as Montaigne, while he is not as cynical as Machiavelli, does suggest that laws are not given by God, but invented by those in power to further their own interests.
60. In "*The Unnatural Tragedy* and Familial Absolutisms" (*Cavendish and Shakespeare, Interconnections*, ed. Katherine Romack and James Fitzmaurice [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006], pp. 179–191), Karen Raber also compares Soeur to Shakespeare's Isabella, stating that "like Isabella," Soeur is forced to "balance her brother's life against her chastity" (p. 184), and that both women believe "the better choice is death with honour over life in sin" (p.185). The main focus of Raber's essay, however, is on how a Royalist of the Commonwealth period such as Cavendish would have understood Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and how Cavendish's

*The Unnatural Tragedy* would have been influenced by such an understanding of Shakespeare's play. The "two plays," according to Raber, "establish an intertextual dialogue about the consequences of sexual transgression for the reciprocal stability of the family and the state" (p. 192). Raber describes her "reading" of Cavendish's play as one in which "*The Unnatural Tragedy* becomes an extremely conservative appropriation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*," but insists that "for the late seventeenth-century reader, who might be a young woman rather like Cavendish herself, the play's influence is not so determined [...]. Such a reader might venerate the Bard—but she might also come to see him as a corpus just begging to be dismembered and rewritten in her own image" (p. 191).

61. Not only is Soeur's downfall not caused "through her silence"; it could also be argued that Soeur does not lose "control over her existence." For it seems to me that in scene 33, where she agonizes over her what she should do, Soeur makes a decision. Running through her possible options, Soeur decides that she will neither report her brother to her father and husband nor give in to Frere's demands for an incestuous relationship with her. Instead, "both" she and her brother "will die, to save [their] Souls, and keep [their] Honours clear."
62. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1997), Prologue.
63. This is the editor's translation of the play's "*Che morte piu dolce che morirei per amore?*"
64. Nicholas Brooke uses the phrase "love-death embrace" in *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies* (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 106.
65. Shakespeare, *Othello*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1997), 5.2. pp. 300–01.
66. Cavendish's suggestion here of narcissistic tendencies on the part of Frere suggests to me self-love, not other-love. Hopkins reads Frere's desire for his sister "in terms of [...] genetic sexual attraction, a phenomenon encountered when those who are related by blood are brought up separately and are subsequently attracted to one another" (6.7).
67. Frere is the same type of possessive male as Othello, who rationalizes that he must kill Desdemona "else she'll betray more men" (5.2.6). This type of the possessive male was later explored by Robert Browning in "Porphyria's Lover." As Corporaal suggests, like Ford's Giovanni, "whose possession of Annabella's heart transcends death," Frere is able "to make his morbid fantasy of an eternal union with Soeur

come true: 'And as we came both from one Womb, do joyn our Souls in the Elizium, our Bodies in one Tomb'" (V.42).

68. One could argue that it is not that Soeur does not speak, but that she speaks only to her brother. Similarly, Madam Bonit also speaks about her abusive husband, but only to her maid. So the problem is not that these women are silent, but that they do not speak publicly—because they worry about reputation and honour.
69. As Hutcheon explains, the Greek noun *parodia* means “counter-song” or “against.” Thus parody “becomes an opposition or contrast between texts.” But *para* can also mean “beside” so there “is a suggestion of an accord or intimacy instead of a contrast” (32). It is this suggestion of “accord,” of working with another text, that I wish to emphasize here.
70. See endnote 19.