

"Touching tochets": 'Perkin Warbeck' and the Buggery Statute (Plumbing hidden depths of transgressive sexual subversion and deviation in 17th-century English theatre)

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Touching Touchets: *Perkin Warbeck* and the Buggery Statute*

At first sight, *The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck* seems to be the only one of Ford's plays which is not pointedly and openly concerned with sexual deviation. Both *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *The Broken Heart* feature either actual incest or the fear of it; *The Lover's Melancholy* is structured around the concept of a passion which verges on the pathological, an erotomania; *The Fancies Chaste and Noble* has at the heart of its plot an allegedly impotent marquis who is believed to keep a harem; *Love's Sacrifice* probes the boundaries of platonic love; and *The Lady's Trial* has one wife who is thought to be adulterous, one who is actually so, and a third who has been sold by her husband to another man. *Perkin Warbeck*, by contrast, presents a cast of characters who seem to be models of sexual rectitude. Perkin and his wife, Lady Katherine Gordon, are romantically devoted to one another and virtually inseparable, while Katherine's former suitor Dalyell cherishes a blameless, totally platonic attachment to her; the Scottish king, James IV - historically notorious for the number of his affairs, and represented as a philanderer in Greene's play about him - is never mentioned in connection with any woman but his future wife, Margaret Tudor; and a similar silence is observed on the subject of the marriage of Lady Katherine's parents, the Earl of Huntly and his royal wife Annabella Stewart, who in real life had had a messy divorce. For once, it seems, Ford's notorious attraction to the exploration of aberrant psychologies has rigorously excluded sexuality from the arena of its concerns.¹ Sometimes, however, dogs that do not bark can be as significant as ones that do, and I am going to argue that far from being devoid of sexual deviancy, *Perkin Warbeck* actually encodes a transgressive sexuality so subversive that its traces are

hidden deep within the fabric of the play, visible only to a reading which historicises Ford's work within very specific contexts.

It has often been suggested that a work of the same year as *Perkin Warbeck*, Milton's *Comus*,² can be profitably located within the context of the sexual scandal surrounding the Earl of Castlehaven, who was related to the Bridgewater family, for whom Milton wrote the masque.³ In 1631 the Earl was found guilty of sodomising one of his servants, for physically assisting another servant to bugger the Countess, and for pandering his daughter-in-law to yet another servant;⁴ *Comus*, it has been suggested, with its insistence on the sexual purity of its participants, was a conscious attempt to improve the reputation of the family, vicariously tainted by association with their notorious relative. No-one has yet suggested a similar context for *Perkin Warbeck*. There was, however, at least one link between the two dramatists in the shape of a shared connection with the Lawes brothers. Henry Lawes took the role of the Attendant Spirit in *Comus*; William seems to have composed the music for the two songs in Ford's last play, *The Lady's Trial*, and to have been employed by the Earl of Newcastle, to whom Ford dedicated *Perkin Warbeck*.⁵ (Newcastle's daughter, Lady Elizabeth Cavendish, was later to marry Viscount Brackley, who had played the elder brother in *Comus*.)⁶ Another link was Francis Bacon, author of one of Ford's principal sources for the play, who was Castlehaven's brother-in-law⁷ (and widely believed to be a sodomite himself).⁸ Moreover, Audley was tried by a jury of twenty-six of his peers, so that the noblemen to whom Ford dedicated his works would have had personal and detailed experience of the case - not to mention the interest that Ford himself, as a member of the Middle Temple and great-nephew of the famous lawyer Sir John Popham, is likely to have taken in the proceedings. For similar reasons, Ford

could also have expected his audience to be *au fait* with the Castlehaven story, since members of the Inns of Court seem to have formed a very prominent part of the private playhouses' audience.⁹

More directly, however, *Perkin Warbeck* refers overtly to the personal history of the Castlehaven family. The family name of the Castlehavens was Touchet, and the original title of the head of the family, before the creation of the earldom, had been Audley: the name of the renegade peer was, in full, Mervyn Touchet, Lord Audley, Earl of Castlehaven. It was an earlier bearer of that title, James Touchet, Lord Audley, whose story is prominently featured in *Perkin Warbeck* as one of the principal leaders of the Cornish revolt. (James Touchet was also the name of Castlehaven's heir, who had initiated the prosecution against his father.) He is mentioned by name four times, and the final occasion is one that might well bring to mind the recent, even more opprobrious, disgrace of another bearer of the Audley title:

Let false Audley

Be drawn upon an hurdle from the Newgate

To Tower-hill in his own coat of arms

Painted on paper, with the arms revers'd,

Defac'd and torn; there let him lose his head.

(III.i.94-8)¹⁰

Moreover, a seventeenth-century source to which Ford's connections would probably have given him access during the composition of *Perkin Warbeck*, Henry Rice's *Life of Sir Rhys ap Thomas*, attributes the capture of Audley (whom it characterises as

‘troubled in his mind’) to Sir Rhys ap Thomas personally.¹¹ Sir Rhys, a major figure in early Tudor South Welsh politics, had married Jenet, widow of Sir Thomas Stradling of St Donat’s, and brought up the Stradling heir; and it was from the Stradling family that Ford’s mother was descended. (Another member of the family, Ford’s cousin Sir John Stradling, anticipated some of the imagery of *Comus* in his use of Sabrina to praise Charles I.)¹²

Additionally, Castlehaven was the brother of the notorious prophetess Lady Eleanor Davies, which would undoubtedly have been of interest to the Stradlings, since their library housed what was referred to as ‘the great Collection of Welsh, English, & Latin Prophecies at St Donats in Glamorganshire’.¹³ Lady Eleanor, wife of the poet Sir John Davies (whose works included the celebrated *Orchestra*), began to prophesy immediately after the accession of Charles I; she was later to claim that her second husband, Sir Archibald Douglas, was the elder half-brother of Charles I - an allegation particularly interesting in the light of the imposture plot of *Perkin Warbeck*. In 1633, the probable period of the play’s composition, her longsuffering husband seems to have lost his reason, while she herself was being particularly vociferous against the court,¹⁴ and openly denigrating Ford’s early dedicatee the Earl of Arundel.¹⁵ Her obsessive habit with punning on the various versions of her own name and those of her relations in her prophecies, coupled with her growing notoriety in the early 1630s, would have made the connection between the name of ‘Audeley’ in the play, and the real-life woman who claimed to be married to the mad royal heir, inescapable.

I have argued elsewhere that the many references in *Perkin Warbeck* to members of the English and Scottish nobility of the late fifteenth century are of great significance, particularly since they all, without exception, figured in the family trees of those mid-seventeenth century nobles with whom Ford himself was associated and to whom he dedicated so many of his works.¹⁶ By representing their ancestors in so positive a light, I have suggested, Ford was pointing up the merits of his own coterie, and effectively endorsing their habitual argument that they were entitled to a hereditary role in government, which Charles I seemed increasingly disposed to deny them. The Audley reference draws on the same networks of knowledge about kinship and ancestry - but to very different effect: instead of drawing attention to the heroic tradition of the aristocracy, it reminds them, instead, of a story of sexual deviance and of behaviour inappropriate to their class. I also want to argue, however, that it works to make two other points, as well, which depend less on a knowledge of genealogy and history than of literary precedents and analogues.

The decisive battle against Lord Audley and his followers is fought at Blackheath. Blackheath had also featured tellingly in an earlier history play, Shakespeare's *Henry V*, where, with a geographical precision rare in Shakespeare,¹⁷ the Chorus locates the triumphant festivities for the king's victory and safe return:

So swift a pace hath thought that even now
You may imagine him upon Blackheath,
Where that his lords desire to have him borne
His bruised helmet and his bended sword
Before him through the city.

(V.o.15-19)

Annabel Patterson points to the potentially disturbing connotations of Blackheath here: ‘the city may be peaceful, but the welcoming crowd “quits” that stable environment for the liminal territory of Blackheath’.¹⁸ Patterson is particularly interested in the fact that the speech very soon moves on to offer a very suggestive analogy for that scene on Blackheath:

As, by a lower but a loving likelihood,
Were now the General of our gracious Empress,
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
How many would the peaceful city quit
To welcome him!

(V.o.29-34)

In her incisive article on gender and kingship in the play, Jean Howard finds *Henry V* a telling comparator for *Perkin Warbeck* in terms of its representations of masculinity and rule;¹⁹ indeed the oppositions seem so strong as to imply a deliberate reworking on Ford’s part of the Shakespearean model, just as he relies on audience sensitivity to differences from a Shakespearean original for much of the effect of many of his other plays, with *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* obviously reworking *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Lover’s Melancholy* taking material from both *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night*, and both *The Lady’s Trial* and *Love’s Sacrifice* ringing the changes on the basic motifs of *Othello*. Moreover, the story of Essex was one of great personal importance for Ford.²⁰ His maternal great-uncle, Lord Chief Justice Popham, had been held prisoner in Essex House at the start of the rebellion; his first published work, *Fame’s Memorial*, had been dedicated to Essex’s sister, Penelope Devereux, and her ill-fated

love affairs have often been taken to have provided the plot-line for *The Broken Heart*.²¹ Ford is, therefore, likely to have been acutely conscious of the twin presences of Henry V and Essex conjured up by the reference to Audley meeting his nemesis on Blackheath: his rebel noble is silently but tellingly juxtaposed with two exemplars of heroic masculinity and, simultaneously, with the twin poles of royal legitimacy and of treasonous rebellion, affording a complexly ironic perspective on the relationship between gender and legitimacy which Jean Howard identifies as a crucial concern of the play. Equally, the Audley name serves to evoke not only the buggery scandal itself but that other literary incarnation of it, *Comus*: at the same time that he destabilises the pretensions of his characters to status and legitimacy, Ford himself is revealed as powerfully aligned within the high literary tradition of Milton and Shakespeare.

Covert allusion to the Castlehaven scandal might also, however, bring to mind another celebrated instance of alleged sexual deviance, and one which would have been of particular interest to the author of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. When *Perkin Warbeck* was published in 1634, it was almost exactly a hundred years since a queen of England, Anne Boleyn, had been accused of incest with her brother, George, Viscount Rochford. Although this may seem to have been very old news indeed - 'Queen Anne is dead' with a vengeance - there were various reasons why the career of Anne Boleyn should have been in Ford's mind. If the events recounted in *Perkin Warbeck* had been of crucial importance for the histories of the great families to whom Ford dedicated his work, so too was the story of Anne Boleyn.

In the first place, Anne was a member of the Howard clan. Her mother, Elizabeth, was the daughter of Thomas Howard, second Duke of Norfolk, who, as ‘Jockey of Norfolk’, had been immortalised in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* - the play which is, of course, implicitly contradicted if we assume that Perkin Warbeck is the legitimate Duke of York, as we are pointedly reminded by the play’s two references to ‘Richard the tyrant, their unnatural uncle’ (I.i.31 and [as a close paraphrase] II.i.66). Elizabeth Boleyn’s nephew had been the poet Earl of Surrey, a major figure in the development of English literature; her great-great-great-grand-nephew was Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, co-dedicattee of Ford’s early work *Honour Triumphant*. The Earl of Arundel was, moreover, the dedicattee of Thomas Gainsford’s work on *Perkin Warbeck*, one of Ford’s two major sources for the play; and the author of the other source, Francis Bacon, was a close associate of Arundel. Arundel was passionately devoted to memorialising the history of his own family. Clarendon said of him that he ‘thought no other parts of history considerable, but what related to his own family’,²² and Arundel was particularly fascinated by the early Tudor period, for he saw this as the period of his family’s greatest power and splendour, and ‘was deeply interested to discover what had made that possible’.²³ In the career of Anne Boleyn, Arundel would have seen the moment when a member of his own lineage was not only elevated to be queen consort of England but had also shaped the course of history by giving birth to the future Elizabeth I.

Anne Boleyn was of importance to other members of Ford’s circle besides Arundel. Her sister, Mary Boleyn, was the great-grandmother of the Earl of Essex and of

Penelope Devereux; Mary was also the great-great-grandmother of Elizabeth Howard, Countess of Peterborough, to whose husband Ford dedicated *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, and the Peterborough family were conspicuously proud of this alliance: Elizabeth Howard's son christened one of the rooms in his house at Drayton the Norfolk room.²⁴ Moreover, the title which Henry VIII bestowed on Anne was Marquess of Pembroke, which will undoubtedly have been of interest to the Earl of Pembroke, to whom Ford dedicated twice, and his brother and heir, the Earl of Montgomery, also a dedicatee: not only had she shared a title with them, but her elevation - however brief - to the marquise would have created the intriguing suggestion that they, too, might have been eligible for the honour. Finally, one of the most avid watchers and chroniclers of Anne's rise to power was Cardinal Wolsey's secretary, George Cavendish, and Cavendish was a member of the same family as William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle, to whom Ford dedicated *Perkin Warbeck*. Another historian of Anne was Nicholas Harpsfield, the Catholic propagandist, who asserted that Anne's lovers had included the poet Sir Thomas Wyatt;²⁵ Harpsfield was also the recorder of the allegedly miraculously ash tree, said to display the cross of Christ, which was blown down in the grounds of St Donat's Castle, Glamorgan, family home of the Stradlings, of whom Ford's grandmother was one.²⁶ Stradling family history had intersected again with the aftermath of the Reformation in the matter of one of the prophecies kept at St Donat's, predicting the return of the Catholic faith and the disgrace of a Primate. A note by Sir Thomas Stradling records: 'I saw this prophecy come to pass. For on Saturday in the Easter week I saw Cranmer Bishop of Canterbury sit on the midst of the alter in our Lady chappell in Powles anno tertio Edwardi 6'.²⁷ Ford's family was further bound up in the affair since Sir John Popham's house of Littlecote (then in the hands of the Darrell family) had been one of

the bases used by Henry VIII during his courtship of Anne's immediate successor, Jane Seymour; the house still has stained glass featuring the entwined initials H and J.

Most crucially of all, Anne Boleyn had been a key factor in Henry VIII's break with the Church of Rome and in the sequence of events which had eventually made England a protestant country. Many of those with whom Ford was associated showed, like his Stradling ancestors, strong signs of residual adherence to Catholicism, and some of his own works may be seen as being informed by a Catholic sensibility.²⁸ It was during his liaison with Anne - and arguably as a more or less direct result of it - that Henry VIII renounced his allegiance to the Pope and precipitated the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century, which were still creating echoes in the Arminian and Laudian debates of Ford's own contemporaries. In evoking the story of Anne, described by Shakespeare and Fletcher in *Henry VIII* (chronologically speaking, the 'sequel' to *Perkin Warbeck*) as 'a spleeny Lutheran' (III.ii.99),²⁹ Ford thus touched on a moment full of resonance not only for the personal histories of those with whom he was connected but for the spiritual history of the nation as a whole. (Interestingly, the story of Anne also overlapped, albeit momentarily, with that of the Audleys: Thomas Audley was one of those who persuaded Cranmer to divorce her from Henry before her execution).³⁰

The play which most precisely seems to parallel certain elements of Anne Boleyn's career is not, however, *Perkin Warbeck*, but *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. The most obvious link is the motif of brother-sister incest, which was one of the charges brought against Anne at her trial, and which both J.C. Flugel and Charles R. Forker

have separately argued was a central issue both in Henry's relationship with Anne and in his reign as a whole;³¹ there may even be a suggestive echoing of Anna Bullen in the name of Annabella, while Anne's cry in the Tower, 'I can say no more but nay withyowt I shuld oppen my body', takes us very close to the heart-motif of *'Tis Pity*.³² Additionally, if Retha Warnicke's recent speculations about Anne Boleyn's final miscarriage are correct,³³ then Anne Boleyn and Annabella both figure in the role of mother whose foetus, untimely expelled from the womb, becomes an object of intense curiosity, and, in the terms of Hippolyta's curse, is open to labelling as a monster. But the name of Annabella may also remind us of that other Annabella, daughter of James I of Scotland, who married and divorced the Earl of Huntly and whose daughter, Lady Katherine Gordon,³⁴ is the heroine of *Perkin Warbeck*. Moreover, Warnicke touches on a further issue very resonant for *Perkin Warbeck* when she argues that the fall of Anne Boleyn can be linked not only to her miscarriage and to accusations of witchcraft against her but also to breaches of the Buggery Statute - the same law that a century later was to ensnare the Earl of Castlehaven.

Warnicke suggests that although he was almost certainly innocent of the incest charge, George Rochford had in fact violated the Buggery Statute.³⁵ Since the Statute had been passed in February 1534, the publication of *Perkin Warbeck* precisely celebrated its anniversary (a fact of which Ford, with his legal training, would no doubt have been well aware, as would the many Inns of Court men likely to have formed part of his original audience). However, only two men were convicted of buggery during the six years immediately following the passing of the Statute: Nicholas Udall, headmaster of Eton and author of *Ralph Roister Doister*, and Walter,

Lord Hungerford, whose title and estates derived from the Berkshire town of Hungerford and whose family were thus the near neighbours of Ford's great-uncle Lord Chief Justice Popham, owner of Littlecote. This connection was to become particularly relevant when Hungerford's elder son Sir Walter accused his wife of adultery with William Darrell of Littlecote, from whom Popham bought the house. Darrell's scandalous reputation as incestmonger and murderer may well have provided partial inspiration for the plot of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*,³⁶ and since Sir Walter willed his land away from his children to his brother and contracted a third marriage during the lifetime of his second wife his legal vicissitudes would surely have been of as much interest to legal minds as the more celebrated ones of his father, who, accused not only of buggery his servants but also of incest with his daughter and of consulting witches to determine how long the king would live, was executed in 1540. (In the generation after Ford's, the Stradling heir would marry a Hungerford, which may indicate a continuing connection between the families.)

Hungerford and Udall were the only two men to suffer under the new law during the reign of Henry VIII. Nevertheless, despite the tiny number of actual convictions, buggery was believed to be rife at the pre-Reformation court, and was particularly associated with those with French manners³⁷ - something which may cast a new light on the Bishop of Durham's description of Perkin's supporter Stephen Frion as 'French both in heart and actions!' (I.iii.53). As Warnicke comments,

Before the Reformation...accusations of sodomy were often directed at courtiers with French manners. According to Baldessare Castiglione, who had visited England late in the reign of Henry VII, there was at some courts "a

most wanton life in every kinde of vice: the women enticefull...and the men womanish.” He maintained that these men “seeing nature...hath not made them women ought...to be banished not only out of princes courtes but also out of the company of gentlemen.” *The Treatise of the Galaunt*, first published in 1510, associated sodomy with men who aped French fashions. It described the courtiers with “womanlike dress” as transvestites.³⁸

Particularly notable in these invectives is the repeated association of sodomy with effeminisation. As Jean Howard has argued in her article, ‘Effeminately Dolent’ (itself a quotation from *Perkin Warbeck*), Perkin himself is seen as radically feminised: in addition to the Scottish court’s stigmatisation of him as ‘effeminate’, she also quotes Gainsford’s comment that Perkin’s kinsman Nathaniel Osbeck ‘declared Warbeck to be a counterfeit who had been named Perkin “for his effeminatenesse and childishnesse”’.³⁹ Interestingly, Howard considers the essence of his effeminacy to reside not, as one might initially suppose, in his relation to men, but in his relation to women. Drawing on early modern conceptions of a continuum rather than an opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality, she suggests, as Laura Levine also does, that what renders men most effeminate is the contaminating contact of women: essentially, therefore, she sees Perkin’s manhood as undermined by his closeness to Katherine.⁴⁰ In particular, she contrasts the representation of Perkin’s courtship with that of Shakespeare’s portrayal of Henry V’s, arguing that Perkin ‘courts and weds Katherine in a manner which is the antithesis of the Lancastrian mode of domination’,⁴¹ and she also cites Hotspur’s ‘great opening speech in *I Henry IV*’, which, she suggests, ‘perfectly expresses masculine outrage at

the contamination of the sacred male arena, the battlefield, by the mincing fop'.⁴² It is, of course, specifically his own behaviour on the battlefield that earns Perkin the charge of effeminate dolency; and the play does indeed deliberately evoke the world of Shakespeare's second tetralogy through repeated echoes.⁴³ Most particularly, though, it is *Richard II* (itself a play featuring a feminised king, and also, of course, the play that Essex's followers had had acted as the prelude to his rebellion) that is cited and suggested;⁴⁴ and with the echo of *Richard II* there surely comes also that of what is effectively its companion piece, the other great sodomy play, Marlowe's *Edward II*.⁴⁵

There are many links between Ford and Marlowe, ranging from the minor - such as their shared propensity to refer to the upwardly mobile, such as Gaveston, as 'mushrooms' - to the major, such as the sustained series of parallels between Dr Faustus and Giovanni,⁴⁶ which are supplemented by having Giovanni quote Tamburlaine (V.v.11-12). *Perkin Warbeck* itself has been described as '*Tamburlaine* rewritten by Ford'.⁴⁷ *Edward II* is less obviously a source for Ford, but there are some suggestive details: Edward exclaims the classically Fordian 'Here, man, rip up this panting breast of mine / And take my heart' (IV.vii.66-7), Lightborn's butcher-like skewering of Edward parallels Giovanni's arrival at the banquet with Annabella's heart impaled upon his dagger, and Edward's 'Shall I still be haunted thus?' (II.ii.153) is directly echoed in the first line of *Perkin Warbeck*, 'Still to be haunted, still to be pursued' - a point made more obvious by the fact that Edward's question is followed almost immediately by an account of devastation on the northern borders (II.II.178-9) which parallels that which so grieves Perkin. There was even a personal connection

between Ford's family and the events of Marlowe's play, since Ford's Stradling ancestors, from their castle of St Donat's, had been associates of the Despensers, whose power-base was also in Glamorgan - Sir Hugh le Despenser's still-extant charter to Margam Abbey bears the signature of Sir Edward Stradling, and since the Stradling family were all renowned antiquaries, the connection is unlikely to have been lost on them,⁴⁸ especially since the play has a heavily Welsh emphasis, with Rice ap Howell, the Welsh hooks, and the scene in Neath Abbey (of which the Stradling library possessed a history).⁴⁹ And other members of Ford's circle would have found their family histories reflected in Marlowe's play: the Earl of Pembroke would have heard how his ancestor was given the right 'in public shows/...[to] bear the sword before the king' (I.iv.349-50), the Earl of Arundel how his Fitzalan ancestor was considered by his peers 'a noble gentleman' (II.v.66). There is even a Touchet, and once again, a Touchet in disgrace, for 'The Lord William Tuchet' is the first name on the list read out by Spencer Junior of those drawn and hanged (IV.iii.12).

Moreover, *Edward II* too, like the story of Anne Boleyn, encodes discourses of anti-papalism,⁵⁰ and Emily Bartels has recently argued that it, like Warnicke's theory about George Rochford and the Buggery Statute, centres on the unspeakability of sodomy.⁵¹ Additionally, all three of these history plays, as well as the story of the Boleyns, have strong connections with Ireland, to which Richard II goes, where Gaveston is sent as Governor, where Perkin has come from (as the masque of wild Irish reminds us), and where the Boleyn ancestors originated and from which Sir Thomas Boleyn derived his earldom of Ormond. *Edward II* shadowing *Richard II* shadowing *Perkin Warbeck* may well seem to be another instance of the deftness and

delicacy within which stories of sodomy are covertly encoded within the text. Equally, the story of a sodomitical king may serve as the most delicate of hints at James I.⁵² *Perkin Warbeck* overtly contrasts styles of kingship in its diptych of James IV and Henry VII; conceivably, it may do so also in its representation of the married love of Perkin and his Katherine, so reminiscent of the mutual devotion of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, but with the taint of effeminate dolency suggesting also the sexual *mores* of the previous reign, just as Rhetias' discreet hints to Palador seem to do in *The Lover's Melancholy* (II.i.135ff).⁵³

Behind this ostensibly most blameless of heterosexual love stories, then, we may faintly discern the shadows of three, or perhaps even four, scandalous ones: the Castlehaven affair, the trials of Anne Boleyn and her allegedly incestuous brother, the history of Edward II, and maybe even that of James I. Their presence may seem to be only very faintly marked, but it is hard to believe that the name Audley did not stir memories in 1634, or that Ford's ancestry-conscious dedicatees were not aware of the echoes of their own family histories, or that his theatrically sophisticated audience were blind to the obvious allusions to *Richard II* and the dependence of that play, in turn, on *Edward II*. A similar resonance would be stirred by the insistent emphasis on Perkin's actorliness. As Jean Howard points out, 'actors were often associated in polemical writings with exactly those transgressions of gender and class boundaries, those losses of distinction, which I am arguing are figured in Ford's play by the person of Perkin'.⁵⁴ She also comments that Perkin 'is often, as at his entry into James's court, presented as a spectacle for the gaze of others,'⁵⁵ which, taken in conjunction with her remark that 'he and Katherine both play "the women's part" to

perfection',⁵⁶ may well remind us of Lisa Jardine's contention, and its development in the work of Laura Levine, that the woman's part on the early modern stage is always already eroticised, with the boy actor implicitly presented as potential partner in a relationship which flirts teasingly with the possibility of homosexuality.⁵⁷ Perkin Warbeck, then, threatens more than the social fabric of the state: he also menaces its sexual status quo.

The social challenge is, though, the more obvious, and its tension is greatly exacerbated by Ford's refusal to follow his sources in decisively disallowing the legitimacy of Perkin's claim to the throne. It may well be that he does this in the service of a specific political and aesthetic agenda,⁵⁸ but whatever his motives, the effect is a striking one: we do not know whether Perkin is a king or a mushroom (a term which itself had connotations of sodomy).⁵⁹ The uncertainty of his origins and the fluidity of his gender position means that he collapses into himself the roles of both the king and the catamite, Edward and Gaveston. Most acutely, we do not know whether in his marriage to Katherine he is not committing precisely the same sort of cross-class liaison that proved so disturbing a feature of both the Castlehaven and the Hungerford sodomy trials.⁶⁰ If Perkin really is an impostor, then even so exalted a personage as King James of Scotland has been, however unwillingly, guilty of the technical crime of disparagement, the arranging of a match which violates social decorum - an action different in degree but not in kind from Castlehaven's breaching of class barriers by pandering his daughter-in-law to his servant. In short, even legitimate, loving, monogamous marriage can be tainted, for even when it is not susceptible to the accusation of sexual deviancy it may well prove vulnerable to that

of *social* deviancy.⁶¹ And since, whether he is or is not a pretender, Perkin is always already an actor, the issue is complicated still further, because this form of pretence, however socially licensed, is also seen as threatening to society by an inbuilt sexual deviancy.

The sexual and the social often co-exist in complex tension in Ford's works. In *The Fancies Chaste and Noble*, there is unease over the relationship between Flavia, the cast-off wife of a merchant, and the aristocrat Julio; in *Love's Sacrifice*, the haughty Fiormonda regards Biancha as socially beneath her brother the Duke; in *The Lover's Melancholy*, the Prince's cousin Thamasta looks down on her more humbly-born suitor Menaphon; in *The Broken Heart*, Ithocles is a 'mushroom' for aspiring to the hand of the Princess; in *Perkin Warbeck* itself, Dalyell is similarly uneasy about his qualifications to court Katherine, arguing, to what seems to me spectacularly subversive effect, that although he is descended from a king,

kindreds are not ours, when once the date
Of many years have swallowed up the memory
Of their originals

(I.ii.34-6)

The clearest instance of the interplay between the social and the sexual, though, occurs in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Hippolita's jealousy of Annabella is pointedly situated in class terms, as she upbraids Soranzo:

'tis not your new mistress,
Your goodly Madam Merchant, shall triumph
On my dejection; tell her thus from me,

My birth was nobler and by much more free.

(II.ii.48-51)

A merchant is, of course, precisely what Perkin Warbeck really was, for the vast majority who discount his claim to have been Richard, Duke of York;⁶² he was alleged to be the apprentice of a Flemish cloth dealer who, while modelling his master's produce on a quayside in Ireland, had been spontaneously acclaimed by the locals as a Plantagenet prince on account of his fine looks and dress. His codename, in the secret correspondence surrounding his various intrigues, was the Merchant of the Ruby.⁶³ Since London merchants were notoriously uxorious, as so wickedly parodied by Beaumont in his portrayal of George and Nell in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, Perkin's attentiveness to Katherine may serve not only, as Jean Howard suggests, to contrast him unfavourably with the more 'masterful' Plantagenets of Shakespeare's second tetralogy, it may also align him with the *mores* of the merchant class rather than the aristocracy. His sexual success is thus his social failure.

To situate *Perkin Warbeck* within the context of the Buggery Statute, therefore, is to become sharply attuned to the complex sociosexual dynamic which ensures that in the society Ford depicts, even married monogamy can prove socially detrimental to its practitioners. Despite its lack of obvious deviancy, *Perkin Warbeck* can thus be seen to share the concern of the rest of the Ford canon with the desperate tension which all his characters experience between social and sexual status. The princely pretender, despite his fine language and (conceivably) even his high birth, finds, like so many of Ford's characters, that he inhabits a world where it is impossible to succeed both

socially and sexually;⁶⁴ metaphorically at least, it is his sexuality which is directly implicated in his inexorable progress to Tyburn, just as it was a heady mixture of sexual and social transgression which brought about the downfall of Castlehaven, of Hungerford, and of the upwardly mobile Boleyns. (If, as B.R. Burg argues, there was also a religious agenda at work in the prosecution of the catholic Castlehaven, that too would surely have been of interest to Ford, many of whose circle and family showed interest in the Old Religion.)⁶⁵

If Ford was indeed hinting at Perkin's possession of royal blood, he may also have been suggesting that even this cannot guarantee security of identity, since all selfhood is presented as being ultimately performed.⁶⁶ Performance is, in itself, inherently associated with buggery in Prynne's fulminations that 'Players and Playhaunters in their secret conclaves play the Sodomites';⁶⁷ in one sense, we are indeed invited to imagine the actor playing Perkin bugging the actor playing Katherine. It is also possible that Ford's membership of a circle residually adhering to the values of the Earl of Essex would have encouraged him to favour a Tacitean approach to historiography, in which worldly success always eluded the noblest.⁶⁸ By situating his ostensibly blameless hero within the context of scandalous sexual deviancy, he perhaps creates a parallel implication that in the society of which he writes - indeed perhaps in *all* human social organisation - purity of essence can always be socially received as corrupt. To hint at Perkin's legitimacy, and yet simultaneously to taint him with the whiff of illegitimate practices, is to create for his hero a character pertinent not only to the conventions of the history play, but to those of tragedy, and

to situate the apparently dramatic anomaly of *Perkin Warbeck* firmly within the concerns of the rest of the Ford canon.

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Notes

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¹For Ford's usual attraction to such exploration, see Babb.

²Though *Comus* was not published until 1637, the title page of the first edition states that it was performed at Michaelmas 1634. *Perkin Warbeck* was published in 1634. Andrew Varney terms 'the non-appearance of sexual material in the so-called Stage Copy of *Comus*' 'a dog that does not bark' (315-6).

³This was first suggested in Breasted.

⁴Dolan, 80.

⁵See Cutts.

⁶See Starr, 803.

⁷McCormick, 51.

⁸Somerset, 53-4.

⁹Armstrong, 237. For the probable sophistication of the Caroline audience, see also Neill and Leech. (I am indebted to Derek Roper for initially drawing my attention to these articles.) Gurr, however, argues that analogies with contemporary events were more likely to be detected when reading plays than when watching them; interestingly, the particular reader whom he (following Tricomi) cites as reading analogically was Philip, 4th Earl of Pembroke, one of Ford's own dedicatees.

¹⁰The other references to Audley in the play are at I.iii.133, III.i.48, and III.i.75.

¹¹Griffiths, 243, n.35, and 244.

¹² See Philip Schwyzer, 'A Map of Greater Cambria', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 4:2 <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/04-2/schwamap.html>>.

¹³Thomas, 407.

¹⁴Cope, xi.

¹⁵Cope, 66.

¹⁶Hopkins, *John Ford's Political Theatre*, chapters one and two.

¹⁷On Shakespeare's generally cavalier attitude to geography, see particularly Hoenselaars, 100-110.

¹⁸Patterson, 86.

¹⁹Howard, 272-3.

²⁰See Hopkins, *John Ford's Political Theatre*, chapter one.

²¹This suggestion was first put forward by Sherman. For a recent, extended exploration of the parallels, see Foster and Foster.

²²Quoted in Nichol Smith, 30.

²³Howarth, 78.

²⁴Cornforth, 64.

²⁵Warnicke, 244.

²⁶Clark, 14.

²⁷Thomas, 408.

²⁸See Hopkins, *John Ford's Political Theatre*, passim.

²⁹That Ford knew Shakespeare's plays well is sufficiently evidenced by his repeated adaptations from them; that he also knew Fletcher is clear from the late Jeremy Maule's recent discovery of an elegy by him on Fletcher's death.

³⁰Warnicke, 229.

³¹Flugel 133, 139-40; Forker 154-7. I am grateful to the *Renaissance Quarterly* reader for drawing my attention to both authors. See also Bruce Thomas Boehrer, *Monarchy and Incest in Renaissance England: Literature, Culture, Kinship, and Kingship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

³²Mazzola, 163.

³³Warnicke, chapter eight, argues that Anne was delivered of a deformed foetus, which laid her open to charges of witchcraft, incest, and adultery.

³⁴Recent historians have suggested that Lady Katherine was in fact the daughter not of Annabella Stewart but of Huntly's subsequent marriage, but Ford could have had no access to this speculation.

³⁵Warnicke, 194-5.

³⁶See Hopkins, 'A Source for John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*'.

³⁷Warnicke, 194. Anthony Bacon, brother of Francis, was charged with sodomy while serving as ambassador in France (I am indebted to the reviewer of this article for this information).

³⁸Warnicke, 194.

³⁹Howard, 273. Hammond notes that Henry Peacham, who was closely associated with Ford's dedicatee the Earl of Arundel, imaged sodomy as counterfeiting (48). Judith Anderson points to the importance of counterfeiting imagery in Bacon, one of Ford's major sources (178).

⁴⁰Howard, 269.

⁴¹Howard, 272.

⁴²Howard, 262.

⁴³See for instance Hopkins, '*Perkin Warbeck and Henry IV Part One*', and Anderson.

⁴⁴See Anderson.

⁴⁵For the links between *Edward II* and *Richard II*, see for instance Charney and Brooke. The historical Edward II and Richard II were also closely associated: Richard II campaigned for his predecessor's canonisation, compiling and sending to Rome a book of his supposed miracles, and he also had his device of the white hart painted on the columns flanking Edward's tomb (Gordon, 18).

⁴⁶See Hoy.

⁴⁷McCabe, 241.

⁴⁸Clark, 5.

⁴⁹Thomas, 404.

⁵⁰See for instance Bartels, 171.

⁵¹This is Bartels' contention throughout her chapter on the play. The prosecutor at Castlehaven's trial called sodomy 'a Crime not to be named among Christians' (Bredbeck, 5).

⁵² There would have been need for special caution here since two of Ford's own dedicatees, Doncaster and Montgomery, as well as the father of a third, Lennox, were or were reputed to have been favourites of James (Somerset, 43 and 45).

⁵³Hill.

⁵⁴Howard, 270.

⁵⁵Howard, 270.

⁵⁶Howard, 275.

⁵⁷Jardine, chapter one; Levine.

⁵⁸See Hopkins, *John Ford's Political Theatre*, chapter two.

⁵⁹ See Albert Rouzie, 'The Dangers of (D)alliance: Power, Homosexual Desire, and Homophobia in Marlowe's *Edward II*', CHECK REF, PP.114-140, p.130.

⁶⁰Valerie Traub argues that '[s]odomy was not...sexually immoral in and of itself; whatever immorality accrued to it was by virtue of its power of *social* disruption' (95).

⁶¹Along rather similar lines, Graham Hammill suggests that 'sexual acts themselves are never proof of sodomy. Sodomy designates sexual acts that need not have "actually happened"' ('Faustus's Fortunes: Commodification, Exchange, and the Form of Literary Subjectivity', *ELH* 63 [1996], pp.309-336, p.324).

⁶²I have argued elsewhere (*John Ford's Political Theatre*, chapter two) that Ford may well have believed in Perkin's legitimacy, as various other writers, including Horace Walpole and Mary Shelley, have done since. Nevertheless, he will have been well aware of the alternative identification of Perkin with the apprentice of a Flemish merchant, which is now almost universally accepted by historians.

⁶³Arthurson.

⁶⁴Howard comments that ‘the wives of James and Henry do not seem to exist’ (269), though this of course betrays an unfortunate misunderstanding of the plot (also evidenced on 265), since she thinks that it is James’ *child*, rather than the king himself, who is to be married to Margaret Tudor at the end.

⁶⁵Burg, 73; see also McCormick, 51.

⁶⁶See Hopkins, ‘Acting the Self’.

⁶⁷Burg, 76-77.

⁶⁸Hopkins, *John Ford’s Political Theatre*, chapter two. The best account of the Tacitean school is to be found in James.

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