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The *Body Politic*, Female Transgression and Punishment in Jacobean Tragedy

1 Jacobean Sexual Politics and Tragedy

Evadne's execution of her royal lover while having sex with him and her suicide in Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, Tamyra's adultery and her torture by her husband in George Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois*, the titular heroine's private marriage with an inferior man and her physical and mental torments until her execution in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, and the wilful transgression of Beatrice-Joanna in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* are all extreme paradigms of female sexual transgression and subsequent punishment placed at the centre of many Jacobean tragedies. The heroines' desires spoil the training in subjection that the deployment of alliance performs, where alliance signifies "a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions."[1] This system lays a heavy emphasis on the rules dictating the forbidden and the illicit and their opposites and on the pairing of the partners on the basis of "definite statutes" insofar as alliance is the main engine of the circulation of wealth.[2]

Socioeconomic changes and shifts in political dependencies in the early seventeenth century generated overwhelming anxiety and insecurity with regard to the subject's connection with and positioning within hierarchical power. To these "structures of feeling"[3] the sexual control of women was central insofar as it was felt to be an imperative for the maintenance of social order and vice versa. In the tragedies of the period the gendering of the resistant subject as female and the foregrounding of the suffering body as punishment for desire, the theoretical and political conflicts over political power are transposed onto the discourses of sex. On the other hand, the sexualisation of the political relations of subjection and resistance is dramatised as being predicated on physical pleas-

1 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* [1976], trans. Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 106.

2 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 106.

3 I draw on Raymond Williams' concept whereby "feeling" is different from "ideology" in that, while taking into consideration formal beliefs, it exceeds them because it is a lived experience of values and meanings. "Structure" refers to "a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension." *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 132.

ure. As Michel Foucault argues, "a problematic of the 'flesh,' that is, of the body, sensation, the nature of pleasure"[4] became central to the deployment of sexuality that since the seventeenth century was gradually superimposed on that of alliance, without however supplanting it. The family, instead of being expelled by the development of this dynamic, became the terrain of the interplay between sexuality and alliance, in which the feminine body played a pivotal role.

Jacobean tragedies (as in Webster, Chapman, Middleton, Beaumont and Fletcher and others) offer an as yet premature instance of the emergence of female pleasure from within the system of alliance as a threatening, because potentially independent, force. That female desire is perceived as downright destructive of the patriarchal law that works on the basis of the analogy between the family and the state, the father/husband and the king is clear from the exemplary punishment of the desiring subjects. The danger embodied in active female sexuality is particularly grave for the maintenance of the hierarchical system intrinsic to this analogy especially when the King's body is consumed by a woman, Evadne, or the husband's body as the king's surrogate is sexually betrayed, as Montsurry is by Tamyra. Because of the symbiotic relationship between king and kingdom,[5] and husband and household, desire, by challenging the authority of the head, destroys the body. Most importantly, it arises as an acute political problem that strikes at the heart of the *body politic* when the latter is literally embodied in *the body natural* of a woman such as the Duchess of Malfi. The complexities involved in the position of a desiring female sovereign increase insofar as her sexual pleasure with her husband, Antonio, surfaces at the intersection of the deployment of alliance with the emergent system of sexuality. In this sense, as I shall argue, Webster adumbrates an Early Modern family on the basis of the companionate marriage emerging precisely from the uneasy coexistence of sexuality and alliance. The interplay, however, could only cease in the violent death of the transgressive female and the smashing of the newly formed system by her brothers, the perpetrators *par excellence* of the psychologically perverse patriarchal rules of alliance.

The fear of the feminine as, by definition, the unruly body turns into a wish for its objectification that is crystallised in its death. The corpse of the raped wife of Antonio on the stage, Gloriana's skull in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the Duchess

4 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 108. Also see Maurizio Calbi, *Approximate Bodies: Gender and Power in Early Modern Drama and Anatomy* (London: Routledge, 2005), n 122, 117.

5 For this symbiotic relationship see Catherine Belsey, "Desire's Excess and the English Renaissance Theatre: *Edward III*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*," in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (New York: Routledge, 1992): 84–102, 86–87.

as a "figure cut in alabaster"[6] and a disembodied echo, along with the Tyrant's necrophilia in Thomas Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, all offer instances of the most shocking expression of the male fantasy of the woman's utter passivity. Because the health of the state mirrors and is mirrored in the well-being of the family and both apparatuses fear women's unregulated reproductive capacity they are heavily dependent for their smooth function on the surveillance of the female body. As Peter Stallybrass argues, surveillance is intensely focused on the female orifices, especially the mouth and the vagina, precisely because what is mapped in and through the chaste woman's body is the integrity of the state: "The state, like a virgin, was a *hortus conclusus*, an enclosed garden walled off from enemies."[7] Of vital importance is that the virginal hymen has to be ruptured by the "appropriate" phallus for the preservation of order. The question is what if the "appropriate" phallus is rejected for a different or better one? In other words, what if pleasure and not duty comprises the female drive? I shall attempt to show that, in the context of the static social body safeguarded by alliance, the mobility and penetrability of female desire turns into a treacherous force because it can easily open the gates of the state to the enemy from without, while at the same time, as in *The Changeling*, it identifies the enemy within. Therefore, sexual transgression, far from being perceived as a private vice, is considered a public crime, the equivalent of petty treason with torture, confinement and death constituting the means whereby the appropriate phallic order is reinstated.

Evadne and the Duchess of Malfi relate to political power in a peculiar manner. The former performs a singularly unfeminine act because she commits tyrannicide on stage. The latter, royal heir and dowager of the dukedom of Amalfi, is a female sovereign (and a widow) and therefore by nature an anomalous being, the very image of disorder. Evadne as a female avenger and the Duchess as a prince inscribe the problematical idea of female power. On the one hand, the social challenge of this improperly placed power is safely co-opted because it is conceptualised as sexual transgression. Evadne's fornication and subsequent adultery with the King, and the Duchess's marital choice of her steward, Antonio, reinscribe the masculine terror of a female sexuality turned loose, which dictates the structure of feeling in Jacobean tragedy (*The Changeling*, *The White*

6 John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi* in *John Webster: Three Plays*, ed. David Charles Gunby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 1.2.374: further references in the text to act, scene and line, abbreviated as DM.

7 Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Margaret Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy Vickers (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986): 123–142, 129.

Devil, *Women Beware Women, The Insatiate Countess* and others). On the other hand, by the very same token in their choice of partners both heroines are ascribed with agency insofar as they are the ones to choose who will rupture their hymen (Evadne) or enter their vagina (The Duchess). The Duchess's transgression, however, is far more dangerous to the male order that Webster criticises. As a widow she is a sexually experienced woman ascribed by the patriarchal myth with insatiable desire, a force which threatens the core of patrilineality. I contend therefore that *sexual transgression as agency* serves as a Jacobean theatrical convention through which the dramatists interrogate and resist the dominant practices of subjection that is also a process of "subjectivation."[8] Resistance to patriarchal absolutism, however short-lived, constructs the common ground for the dramatists' critique of the hegemonic ideology that conceives of the body of the king as "the social plenum"[9] that provides dependency and incorporation as the subjects' only available positions.

In *Basilikon Doron* James I draws attention to the political urgency of the king's exemplary nature, as indicated by his being on public display:

> It is a trew old saying, That a King is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold ... and according to the outward appearance, if his behauiour bee light or dissolute, will conceiue prae-occupied conceits of the Kings inward intention ... and praeiudged conceits will ... breed contempt, the mother of rebellion and disorder.[10]

Webster and Beaumont and Fletcher set on stage the body, the gestures, and the small actions of the sovereign for the spectators to behold, but the spectacle is rather peculiar. What is exposed in *The Duchess of Malfi* is the body of a pregnant woman, whose symptoms of pregnancy are described by the malcontent, Bosola, as physically revolting. In *The Maid's Tragedy* the King is shown to be asleep. On waking up, and while blissfully expecting a novel sexual experience, he is tied to his bed by Evadne who sadistically carves him to death. The King is not only murdered on stage but his death is displayed in the context of sadomasochistic

8 See Judith Butler's reading of the Foucauldian notion of subjectivation which is "bound up with subjection" as a process that, however, allows "resistance to regulation or to the form of subjection that regulation takes." Judith Butler, "Competing Universalities," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, eds. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2000): 136–181, 151.

9 Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* [1997] (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2000), 28.

10 James I, "*Basilikon Doron*," in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: CUP, 1994): 1–61, 49.

foreplay. Considering the concept of the king's two bodies, a *body natural* and a *body politic*, the question that these tragedies pose is what happens when of the sovereign's two bodies the physical one, as with all other human bodies, is shown to be either disgusting or foul while the metaphorical transcendent body is deemed infallible and immortal. Beaumont and Fletcher offer an intense dramatisation of the issue of the subject's position in the face of this glaring dissymmetry between the king's two bodies, which sets him/her before the dilemma of either to submit or resist. The spectacular murder of the King's body in bed by a woman's hand serves as the corporeal transcription of the collapse of the boundaries between the sovereign and the (female) subject who, significantly, constructs herself as an avenger. By turning the King's outward appearance and his dissolute conduct into a wretched spectacle the dramatists show how contempt by the tyrant for his subjects does indeed breed rebellion.

In *The Duchess of Malfi* the orthodox reading of the *body politic* is inverted insofar as in the place of a prince/mind, who should rule over his people/body, there is a woman who is, according to the stereotype, the irrational sex *par excellence*. The Duchess's sexual choice of her steward and her marriage to him fully articulates the frightening vision of women on top, intensified by yet another grave inversion whereby in the state's mirror structure, that is, the family, the husband must be the head to woman/body. Interestingly, what connects the aberrant femininity in the figure of the Duchess with the King in *The Maid's Tragedy* is "unbridled" sexual desire that overrules reason. Although usually identified with the female body, excessive appetite does not necessarily coincide with it as in the case of the lustful nature of the tyrant that has defined the type since Plato. The King flagrantly violates the law and morality in order to accommodate his desire for Evadne. By opting for a private marriage with an inferior and raising a family in secret the Duchess as an independently sovereign figure implicitly performs a similar function. Rebecca Bushnell observes the explosive political nature of the collapse of the two bodies into one:

> Insofar as the 'natural' or physical body of the monarch stood for the mystical 'corporation' of the body politic, the unity of the natural and mystical bodies of a king posed a danger to the state: the identification of the two implied the disintegration of the body politic with the vulnerability of the king's natural body.[11]

11 Rebecca Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theatre in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990), 38–39. Bushnell draws particular attention to the association between tyranny and effeminacy (63–69).

Both tragedies dramatise precisely the identification of what ought to remain distinct and separate, that is, the *body politic* is required to remain distinct from the *body natural*. In *The Maid's Tragedy* Evadne's body is the terrain where the King is revealed to be essentially only a physical being, something that paves the way to succession by his brother, Lysippus, a better man. Although the King's *body natural*, subject to sexual perversion, is butchered by a woman on stage, the *body politic* survives intact through his successor. In fact, the spectacle of the dead royal body becomes the presupposition for the continuation of the *body politic*: regicide neither causes divine wrath nor does it upset the natural order.[12] *The Duchess of Malfi*, on the other hand, questions long-ingrained assumptions about women's rule as naturally tyrannical, and women's desire as insatiable, embedded in the supposed feebleness, changeability and vulnerability of the female body.[13] Webster constructs a female aristocrat whose desire in violation of social status and traditional gender position disempowers her politically and renders her a private person. However, by shifting the connection between tyranny and emotional and physical excess from the Duchess to the real tyrant, her brother, Ferdinand, the text performs a subversive gesture. The *body politic* is not simply sick but in the Aragonian brother's lycanthropia inscribes in a paradigmatic manner the psychological bestiality that is the absolute mark of tyranny. Ferdinand's incestuous desire for his sister, that is the underside of his patriarchal authority, and the Tyrant's necrophilia in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* are certainly the most perverse instances of a dramatic politics that sexualises the problem of subjection and resistance to royal absolutism.

Beaumont and Fletcher turn the tyrant's death into a public spectacle by sensationally exposing it on stage, and in *The Tragedy of Valentinian* John Fletcher exhibits the painful symptoms of poisoning while his eponymous protagonist is dying. James I's argument against "monstrous and vnnaturall rebellions" in the eventuality of "intolerable abominations a souereigne prince commit"[14] is that the latter will eventually be punished in heaven; hence the king's injunction to his subjects to suffer in patience tyrannical abuse. In flagrant challenge of this dogma these tragedies stage the murder of the tyrant by the resistant subject. By the same token, they foreground the corruptibility

12 William Shullenberger, "'This For the Most Wrong'd of Women:' A Reappraisal of *The Maid's Tragedy*," *Renaissance Drama* 13 (1982): 131–156, 151.

13 According to John Knox once women become rulers their "natural" weaknesses turn into those vices that typify the tyrant, such as, for example, irrationality, cruelty and instability. Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants*, 65.

14 James I, "The Trew Law of Free Monarchies," in King James VI and I, *Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 62–84, 83.

of *the body natural* and its absolute desecration. *The Maid's Tragedy* is particularly interesting in another respect, too in that it inscribes the shift in the concerns of tragedy "from military to sexual honour"[15] politicising therefore female honour by differentiating it from its prevalent identification with chastity. In her dual capacity Evadne embodies at once the hero of the tyrannicide tradition and the sexually wronged woman who turns avenger in the name of her lost honour. This is a rather singular instance in a genre where women figure as the instigators of revenge as, for example, Charlotte, sister of Bussy, in George Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois,* but not as *perpetrators*. Or where the chaste body of a woman who decided to take her own life rather than submit to a lustful male, functions stereotypically as the engine for male honourable revenge, as exemplified by Gloriana in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the Lady in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy,* Lucina in *The Tragedy of Valentinian* among others.

In *Bussy D'Ambois* female adultery is politicised albeit in manner different from *The Maid's Tragedy*. Tamyra is not the protagonist but Bussy, who, feeling his freedom curtailed by the increasing concentration of power in the court, becomes the spokesman for the inherent rights of man; hence he is part of the republican tradition of antiquity, as represented by Brutus and Cassius.[16] However, Tamyra is important insofar as her adultery with Bussy and her subsequent torture at the hands of her husband, Montsurry, forcefully inscribe not only the analogy between the state and the family but also their collapse into each other, thus offering a conceptual foundation for Chapman's problematics of subjection. In this sense, her sexual transgression is central to the dramatic action because it turns the adulterous wife from being a subject to her husband and the monarch to the subject of resistance against her double subjection. Although she does not physically kill Montsurry, she sexually betrays him, thereby symbolically cutting off the head of the conjugal body assumed to be the husband.[17] Her sexual offence far from being private lies at the core of the above political analogy: for this reason she is arraigned for treason, and a justification is given for her torture on the rack which would be the same as any other enemy of the state.

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15 Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1989), 157.

16 As J. W. Lever argues in *The Tragedy of State: A Study of Jacobean Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), 43. Bussy "looks ahead to the stand of John Lilburne and his Levellers in the English Revolution that lay forty years ahead."

17 For the issue of "male headship" in marriage see Frances E. Dolan, *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 26–27.

2 The *Body Politic* on Stage

Webster significantly chooses as the opening speech of *The Duchess of Malfi* Antonio's description of the ideal *body politic* in France:

> In seeking to reduce both State and people
> To a fix'd order, their judicious King
> Begins at home. Quits first his royal palace
> Of flatt'ring sycophants, of dissolute,
> And infamous persons, which he sweetly terms
> His Master's master-piece, the work of Heaven,
> Consid'ring duly, that a Prince's court
> Is like a common fountain, whence should flow
> Pure silver-drops in general. But if't chance
> Some curs'd example poison't near the head,
> *Death and diseases through the whole land spread*.
> (DM, 1.1.5–15)

Although Antonio makes it clear that he exempts the Duchess from his indictment, his admiration for her is expressed in clearly personal terms: he simply idealises her as a woman without mentioning any public quality that would recommend her as his ideal superior. However, for Webster there had been a recent paradigm of an exemplary female monarch and that was Elizabeth whose sexual politics nonetheless were the exact opposite of his heroine's. The English queen made her *body natural* serve her *body politic* in accordance with the Tudor dogma of the immutability of the monarch, while at the same time resolving the oxymoron of a female sovereign. This Elizabeth accomplished by remaining a virgin, that is, by sealing the orifices of her body from male penetration and by simulating in her own physicality the immutability and impenetrability of the *body politic*. Her dexterous handling of her sexual [non]availability consolidated her rule through a uniquely hegemonic gesture that was entirely hers: "she redefined the concept of the female body politic [...] through her uniting her natural and political bodies."[18] In this case the identification of the two bodies, far from signifying the tyranny of desire over the intellect, marks its opposite. Insofar as the female body is insulated and absolutely closed upon itself, the state remains safe and healthy. By the same token it is masculinised because it was not legally penetrable.

18 Theodora A. Jankowski, *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (Urbana and Chicago: Illinois UP, 1992), 64. Interestingly John Knox uses the image of "a corrupted fountain" for the female rule (quoted in Jankowski 63).

By contrast the Duchess's body is open and therefore her sovereignty is morally and politically ambiguous. As Antonio tells Delio "The common rabble do directly say / She is a strumpet" (DM, 3.1.25–26) precisely because she conflates the two bodies by having sex with an inferior; her changing pregnant body inscribes her fundamental fluidity and instability. The Duchess's *body natural* therefore deceives her people because it is pregnant with secrets: her private marriage and the raising of a family constructs a shadowy *body politic* that improperly duplicates the proper one since it coincides with her bedroom and with the night, where the husband rules, as Antonio claims, "only in the night" (DM, 3.2.8). The vision of an ideal commonweal such as the French kingdom evaporates when the Duchess's initial pose of rank superiority, in her wooing of Antonio, gives way to her famous appeal to him few lines later: "This is flesh, and blood, sir, / 'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster / Kneels at my husband's tomb" (DM, 1.2.372–374). In this scene the Duchess dispenses with her widowhood in that she now forsakes mourning and her link with a marital past. The key line in the whole play is "flesh and blood" because it is the crux of Webster's state politics. His heroine's emphatic corporeality, her pregnancy and pleasure in married sex, are presented as an early attempt to adumbrate the private sphere as constitutive of subjectivity and vice versa; as such it is pitted against the sick patriarchal apparatuses of the church and state embodied in the Cardinal and the Duke Ferdinand. The Duchess bleeds as a woman and a mother, blood signifying her femaleness and sexual desire. Blood is the life-asserting principle of a young woman who refuses to remain "widowed" by being turned into a statue, to which she was condemned by the Aragonian patriarchy. From the text arises the Duchess's "personal" adherence to flesh/blood as the founding principle of a new organisation of sexuality identified with reproduction where pregnancy and marital sexual pleasure turn the family into the locus of desire and bliss. As Judith Haber acutely observes, "the association of pregnancy here with sexual pleasure and bodily excess on the one hand, and with female sociality on the other, make it potentially threatening to a patriarchal order in ways that have been lost … in its current desexualized and medicalized form."[19]

My argument is that the privileging of flesh in the play appears as an emergent form of the deployment of sexuality. Central to this is precisely the redefinition of blood outside and against the deployment of alliance whose logic is projected in the Aragonian brothers' obsessive valorisation of the purity of patriarchal blood. On hearing that the Duchess has given birth to a son the Cardinal

19 Judith Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 85–86.

wonders, "Shall our blood? / The royal blood of Aragon and Castile, / Be thus attainted?" (DM, 2.5.22–24), while Ferdinand wants to find a "desperate physic" (DM, 2.5.25) that would "purge infected blood, such blood as hers" (DM, 2.5.26). Because Ferdinand perceives his twin sister's body as a mirror image of his own, in which his own aristocratic blood flows untainted, class-endogamy verging on incest "naturally" emerges as the aristocracy's defence mechanism from alien intrusion from inferior ranks. Even more so, when this intrusion is felt as an essentially sexual offence against Ferdinand himself insofar as his sister's body "functions as a specular image, conferring an 'ideal unity' also on *his* body."[20] However, this "ideal unity" is the spectral image of a sick patriarchal apparatus that suffers from "lycanthropia" (DM, 5.2.6), Ferdinand's disease. To common blood ties dictating positionality in the context of alliance that consolidates and reproduces inheritance and dynastic interests Webster juxtaposes the blood of the Duchess's independent female corporeality.

Central to affective bonds generated by her maternal and sexual femininity, an attractive alternative to the hierarchical subjection that describes alliance, is the image of the womb and the pregnant body in particular. Bosola's obsessively misogynist gynaecological discourse in its compulsive disclosure of female interiority constructs the Duchess's pregnancy as sickness (DM, 2.1.67–70). Her pregnant body is inscribed as grotesque in the system of patriarchal alliances, falling woefully short of the "classical body" which is "[n]ot to be eaten, not to be entered."[21] But this very same image is pitted against the beauty of fecundity that lies precisely in a body to be eaten as in Antonio's proud remark: "She's an excellent / Feeder of pedigrees" (DM, 3.1.5–6). At the end however, the Duchess's flesh will turn into a prey for her lycanthropic brother in the same way that her blood will seal her martyred femininity. The Duchess returns from the grave as an immaterial voice, "a thing of sorrow" (DM, 5.3.24), echoing significantly her husband's words. Idealised as a suffering, almost saintly, femininity she is finally meant to reinscribe the physical abnegation, a position to which she was culturally relegated and that she has fought against. On dying, she is turned into "some reverend monument" (DM, 4.2.33), an eternal object. Significantly, however, the vision of a new healthy *body politic* closes the play in Antonio's and her own son, the offspring precisely of class adulteration who will succeed the dead

20 Calbi, *Approximate Bodies*, 28.

21 Peter Stallybrass, "Reading the Body and the Jacobean Theatre of Consumption: *The Revenge Tragedy* (1606)," in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, eds. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York: Routledge, 1991): 210–220, 214.

aristocrats. "These wretched eminent things" (DM, 5.5.113) now, in the voice of the dying Cardinal, plead to be erased from history.

In direct contrast with Elizabeth the Duchess is subjectivated by refusing her impenetrability and by "choosing instead who may 'enter' her."[22] However, *The Maid's Tragedy* inscribes a more extreme instance of female subjectivation though the sexual act. Evadne chooses the reverse: she is the one who penetrates the male body by symbolically raping and killing the King. On her wedding night she repells her husband's advances, and when he takes her conduct as maidenly bashfulness, she scornfully remarks: "A maidenhead Amintor at my years?"[23] Furthermore, she deals a final blow to his masculinity in her boastful declaration: "I doe enjoy the best" (MT, 2.1.327) implying that he is second. Evadne's sexual ascendancy over Amintor relegates him to a "feminine" position but so does his passive endurance of his cuckolding by the tyrannical king. The tragedy equates non-resistance to tyranny with a stereotyped femininity: the subject who suffers patiently the sovereign's injustice is a feminised subject.

The King's interrogation of Amintor on his wedding night expresses the great pleasure he takes in the young man's emasculation, while his kissing Evadne in front of him marks her as royal property. When she plainly declares to Amintor her adulterous affair in front of the King it is only then that he cries "Y'are a tirant" (MT, 3.1.252) and fantasises himself as a violent regicide. He would dismember the King's body and scatter his limbs all over the land.[24] It is precisely the illicit sexual act that the King performs from which emerges Amintor's instantaneous recognition that the sovereign is "meere man" (MT, 3.1.263), and the transgressive female body serves as the terrain upon which this ideological disenchantment takes place. Thus, he would disfigure the King's *body natural* so that the *body politic* would survive and regenerate itself for ever. However, to the King's challenge to draw his sword Amintor stops his "treacherous hand" from touching "holy things!" (MT 3.2.280–281). In a militarist world full of brandishing swords Amintor, in a telling gesture of self-emasculation, drops his sword before the King's holy body. In this sense, his initial advice to his wife concerning the King's offence, "let us / Suffer, and waite" (MT, 2.1.346–347), anticipates his future submission in its articulation of the discourse of Jacobean monarchy on

22 Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form*, 76.

23 Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy*, ed. Andrew Gurr (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), 2.1.220: further references to acts, scenes and lines in the text, abbreviated as MT.

24 See Gurr's note for Amintor's threat that he would "send [the King's] *lives* through all the land" (MT, 3.1.260), in which he notes many editors' acceptance of Theobald's emendation "your lims" (115), which I also accept.

the wronged subject's position in the face of the sovereign's abusive power. He reiterates it later in his injunction to Melantius, who wishes to take revenge for his wronged honour, "rather live / And suffer with me" (3.2.276–277) in a language that rephrases James's command to the subjects of tyrannical rule.

But there is no exit for the King insofar as "the image of the body politic is vitiated by its participation in a duality, caught between the singularity of royalty and the commonality of the visceral body."[25] In other words, the *body politic* has by definition collapsed into the *body natural* of the tyrant which, shown to be exclusively "visceral," causes the pollution of the former. The one who definitely "strikes" is Evadne, both convinced and coerced by her brother Melantius to take revenge upon the King. Melantius draws his sword on her and forces her to the ground: "speake, you whore, speake truth, / Or by the deare soule of thy sleeping father / This sword shall be thy lover" (MT, 4.1.108–110). In disciplining the sexually unruly woman Melantius threatens to penetrate his sister's already penetrated body by means of his phallic sword while standing on top of her in a symbolical display of patriarchal superiority.[26] As William Shullenberger incisively remarks "[t]he claim of family, that primary organization of psychic energy [...] is the snare in which Melantius catches his sister. He couples his death threat with the spectre of their blood father to tear Evadne from her liaison with the king."[27] Thoroughly disciplined she will be sacrificed by her brother in a coldly premeditated act, her tyrannicide appearing as obedience to male command.

However compelled into revenge, it is through this act that Evadne constructs her subjectivity by resisting patriarchal regulation. This process of subjectivation, although fragile and short-term, is what enables her to recognise the exact form of subjection that patriarchal regulation takes. Significantly her position in the court as the King's lover, which she had perceived as empowerment before realising her disposability, is precisely what genders her sense of injustice as "the most wrong'd of women" (MT, 5.1.127). That this awareness is articulated in the misogynist terms voiced by her brother anticipates her eventual gender cooopting but at the same time it enables her to turn her personal plight into a cath-

25 Jason R. Denman, "Anatomizing the Body Politic: Corporeal Rhetoric in *The Maid's Tragedy,*" *Philological Quarterly,* 84.3 (2005): 311–31, 314.

26 Although Melantius's phallic aggression is reminiscent of Ferdinand who threatens the Duchess with their father's poniard, here there is no trace of incestuous desire. The sexual undertones inscribe the powerful homoeroticism exhibited in the friendship of Amintor and Melantius. The latter's excessive grief for the death of his friend is contrasted with his total indifference towards his slain sister. To him Amintor was his "Sister, Father, Brother, Sonne" (MT, 5.3.287).

27 Shullenberger, "'This For the Most Wrong'd of Women'," 148–149.

olic demand for justice: the King is "such a tyrant / That for his lust would sell away his subjects" (MT, 5.1.103–104). As a rebellious subject, an avenger who could paraphrase Vindice's self-assertion in *The Revenger's Tragedy* into "'Tis I, 'tis Evadne, 'tis I," she takes revenge for all the victims of tyranny. Finding the King asleep in his bed she decides not to kill him while he is sleeping but to confront him with his "sicke conscience" (MT, 5.1.35) articulating thus the heroic ethos of the typical avenger. Because the whole act is seen by the King as a "pretty new device" (MT, 5.1.47), put up in order to arouse him, her medicalised linguistic violence targets his body: "You are too hot, and I have brought you physicke, / To temper your high veines" (MT, 5.1.56–57). The royal lover misreads "physicke" as implying her body but Evadne hastens to restore meaning: "I know you have a surfeited foule body, / And you must bleed" (MT, 5.1.60–61). She will make the king's "foule" *body natural* bleed by stabbing it to death in order to heal the sick *body politic* through a restorative blood-letting. In an effort to retrieve his power he commands her by re-registering his position as "thy King," but he soon gives way to the emergent subject of resistance whom he implores to pity him.

At the end of the tragedy the dramatic politics transcribe the extreme radicalism of tyrannicide as a passionate act done by a woman for a man's love. In a spectacular reversal Evadne is the one to implore Amintor to have sex with her. This happens after showing her repentance in a familiar recuperation of female resistance in Jacobean drama: "My whole life is so leprous it infects / All my repentance" (MT, 4.1.223–224).[28] Here the female tyrannicide turns her phallic knife against herself because she is sexually rejected by her husband. In this sense, she duplicates Aspatia, the wronged virgin, who dies by her beloved Amintor's sword that is thrust into her in a displaced form of coitus. The female body on stage, whether fully penetrated or obsessively closed up, is finally entered and thus symbolically reinstated as a fissured thing in the patriarchal order. However, there is a residue left. Upon discovering the King's dead body one of his attendants wonders "who can beleeve / A woman could doe this?" (MT, 5.1.143–144) This simple statement ironically sums up the dramatists' strategy of resistance which is not obfuscated by the final verdict that typically denies female agency by registering it simply as a means to a patriarchal end.

In Chapman, Bussy's liaison with Tamyra represents the trespassing into Montsurry's fenced-in enclosure by a low-born agent and the symbolic confer-

28 The infection of the body politic by female sexual transgression also marks *The Changeling* which ironically echoes Evadne's eventual position by having Beatrice-Joanna admit to her father that she "bleeds" for his, and the citadel's "better health."

ring on him of a class-privilege to which he is not entitled. The threat that Bussy's sexual desire poses to the aristocratic body on the whole is explicit in Montsurry's initial suspicion that the upstart might have "privy access" to the Duke of Guise's wife.[29] The opening up of the enclosed elite to the upward mobile intruder is dangerous because of the possible dilution of aristocratic blood through the prospect of illicit offspring. This is an essentially political problem insofar as it disrupts the patriarchal inheritance of property and power. Interestingly, adultery emerges as a class-contingent offence as is obvious from Montsurry's toleration of Monsieur's advances to Tamyra because he is a prince. In a constitutional language he shows how the princes' prerogative cancels the law represented by Parliament and their adherence to law is therefore a pure formality (BD, 22.118–123). To this political realism verging on cynicism Tamyra juxtaposes her right of resistance. She correctly discerns that her compliance with the prince's immodest proposal would be tantamount to political subjection. To Monsieur's threat that he has "power t'advance and pull down any" (BD, 2.2.54), should she not submit to him, she responds by politicising an essentially sexual offence in a language that emphasises the subject's emergent demand for self-determination: "Mine honour's in mine own hands, spite of Kings" (BD, 2.2.59).

Chapman foregrounds the heroine's choice of Bussy as a double assault on socio-political order: first, on the patriarchal power of the husband and, second, on the political power of the prince. Her sexual desire for Bussy designates her new obedience to an alternative hierarchical system, ruled by "blood" as synonymous with passion, directly inimical to the state-family analogical structures and the values invested in them. Her subjectivation is constructed in and through adultery insofar as she will use her submission to marital legality as a tool for her new subjection to the law of passion this time, something construed as typical female hypocrisy. Montsurry voices the misogynist topos of women's sexual agency as monstrous, and wonders "with what monsters women's imaginations engross them / when they are once enamoured" (BD, 3.2.280–281). Later on he uses the Copernican image of the reversal of order in order to underscore women's transgression as a rebellion against all hierarchical gradations of family and state alike. In a typical hegemonic gesture the state apparatuses are naturalised as cosmic order, so Tamyra's shifting out of her place is tantamount to her shifting out of the order of Creation (BD, 5.1.150–157). She must be thoroughly disciplined in order to accept subjection as the only position that these structures analogical to patriarchy afford her.

29 George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois*, ed. Nicholas Brooke, *The Revels Plays* (London: Methuen, 1964), 3.2.221–222: further reference to act, scene and line in the text, abbreviated as BD.

Montsury uses torture to interrogate Tamyra by stretching her on the rack and stabbing her arms repeatedly. With the exception of this scene, the rack, "that potent symbol of the state's compulsion to wring truth from the subject,"[30] but also a gratuitous marker of its power, does not appear on the Renaissance stage that nonetheless displays other extreme forms of corporeal violence. Consequently the staging of the officially sanctioned form of violence that only the state is allowed to inflict on offenders, and *not* husbands on adulterous wives, is precisely what differentiates this tragedy from others. Montsurry uses the rack in order not to extract the truth about Tamyra's adultery, which he already knows, but to force her to write a letter as a bait to her lover so that, caught in the trap, he could be murdered, something that eventually happens at the end. But this does not adequately justify the form of torture. Most emphatically the choice of the rack as an instrument of state torture signifies the essentially political nature of the offence against the husband who is also the lord and head of the conjugal body. Tamyra under torture exclaims: "O who is turn'd into my Lord and husband? / Husband? My Lord? None but my Lord and husband" (BD, 5.1.143–144). The lord-husband, as the microcosmic replica of the sovereign, stages "private" punishment as a state spectacle in the context of a text that consistently underscores the structural continuity between the state and the family; indeed, both are deemed instrumental in the notion of order that it interrogates. Tamyra's tortured corporeality inscribes the gendering of the resistant subject while, at the same time, it serves as a paradigm of state violence exercised on the body of the rebel. Chapman specifies the character "of the vexed relation between the subject and the early modern state"[31] from the point of view of the subject's subjection to violence. While being stabbed Tamyra emerges as victim of Montsurry's tyranny: "[F]eel, O feel / how you are turn'd to stone; with my heart blood. / Dissolve yourself again, or you will grow / Into the image of all Tyranny" (BD, 5.1.129–131). He impressively collapses the tyrannical state into sadistic masculinity in the figure of the husband-torturer: "Now break [my arms] as you please, and all the bounds / Of manhood, noblesse, and religion" (BD, 5.1.119–120).

State violence extracts the truth from the body of the criminal, which at the same time it constructs as the physical imprint of a visible and spectacular power. In Foucault's theory of the shift from the violence performed on the body to the knowledge of the soul from the Classical Age onwards, torture is crucial because it reveals the operations of power:

30 Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 55.

31 Hanson, *Discovering*, 56.

> [I]t made it possible to reproduce the crime on the visible body of the criminal; in the same horror, the crime had to be manifested and annulled. It also made the body of the condemned man the place where the vengeance of the sovereign was applied, the anchoring point for a manifestation of power, an opportunity of affirming the dissymmetry of forces.[32]

Montsurry physically inscribes on the material surface of Tamyra's body his vengeance as a sovereign, thus visibly reasserting "the dissymmetry of forces." He sculpts his wife's body by literally re-inscribing it with his own male "characters" (alphabet) in a language strongly reminiscent of Melantius' threat to write his male alphabet on Evadne's flesh: "Till thou writ'st / I'll write in wounds (my wrongs' fit characters) / Thy right of sufferance. Write" (BD, 5.1.124–126). The script is monotonous, and consists of a single word, "whore," but writing reasserts masculinity and restores destabilised order. At the same time, by cutting openings on her body, Montsurry symbolically duplicates the specific form that adultery has taken, namely, Bussy's illicit sexual penetration of the aristocratic body. In this sense, he re-enacts the crime in the criminal's corporeality turning his wife's punishment into a spectacle that foregrounds and reconfirms official disciplinary practices.

Bussy D'Ambois "appropriately" closes with Tamyra's reversion to the position of a masochistic femininity, reminiscent of Evadne, in her declaration to her husband that she loves her wounds "[b]eing open'd by your hands." (BA, 5.3.240) However, this conventional gesture of co-opting is undercut by Chapman's refusal to offer the couple's reconciliation as a closure. They can forgive but not reunite, their separation underscored by the direction "*exeunt severally.*" In the sequel to the play, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, Tamyra strikes back, conspiring in her husband's death with Clermont who will take revenge upon Montsurry for the murder of his brother Bussy. Chapman, like Webster and Beaumont and Fletcher, genders the subject of resistance as a sexually aberrant woman in order to question the ideological and material workings of state power. Central to this essentially dissenting practice is the female body through which the disintegration of the *body politic* is staged in ways that only seemingly reconfirm the dominant narrative of subjection. In this sense, these tragedies and others despite their ambiguities and ambivalences, or thanks to them, offer complex and essentially radical readings of the problem of power and the subject's position in the face of it.

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32 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], trans. Alan Sheridan (Middlesex: Penguin, 1979), 55.

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