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*From the Classics to the Italian World:
Elizabethan Essays*

Stephen Orgel



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AIRSR

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This book series aims to gather in a single volume a selection of prominent Renaissance scholars' productions, collectively unavailable on the market, but fundamental to the study of Anglo-Italian literary relations. The scope and temporal boundaries of AIRSR range from the Humanist engagement with the Classical legacy to the late seventeenth century, investing all genres of the Anglo-Italian Renaissance.

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(Cesare Ripa, *Allegory of the Printing Press*, 1645)

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For
Loretta Innocenti

Introduction

The essays collected here span a fifty year period. The earliest, “The Poetics of Spectacle”, was written as a lecture for the University of Virginia, and became the Introduction to my *Inigo Jones: The Theatre of the Stuart Court* (1973), a collaboration with the historian Roy Strong. It was designed to counteract the prevailing critical assumption that court masques were “mere spectacle”, and thus were not to be taken seriously. In Renaissance England court masques were highly charged political and cultural statements, and there was nothing “mere” about court spectacle.

My early work was on Ben Jonson and court theatre, and I resisted the pressure, quite strong in those days (and even stronger now) to concentrate on Shakespeare. But in the university Shakespeare was what needed to be taught, typically the only literature course that non-majors would enroll in. In view of the overwhelming concentration on Shakespeare, it is difficult to take into account that he was not a literary pundit but, first of all, a popular dramatist. As a literary writer he was best known in his own time as the poet of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, both of which went through many more editions than any of the plays. The plays only became literature when they became books, most notably with the publication of the first folio in 1623, long after Shakespeare’s death. This in effect turned Shakespeare into an English classic, and the plays – and even more the playwright – had to be continually revised to maintain this status; hence the common claim now that Shakespeare must always, really, have been writing for publication. Didn’t he really always think of himself as a poet? But the answer to this is no: when he thought of himself as a poet, he wrote quite differently – and despite their popularity in his own time, the poems over the centuries have elicited relatively little critical interest.

Plays are very different from books, and transforming the text of a play into a book was not a straightforward process, and was clearly, in Shakespeare's case, not the work of the playwright. A script is a set of instructions for performance – this term for the text of a play supplied to the actors apparently dates only from the late nineteenth century; it also implies that the work is written by hand. Nevertheless, turning the script into a performance involves not simply following instructions, but supplying a good deal of both action and interpretation – any play, by the time it reaches the stage, is a profoundly collaborative enterprise. Turning the play then into a reading text, a legible narrative, requires even more rethinking. A great deal of information is required in a narrative, ranging from the most basic, such as the characters' names, to very complex stage directions. Consider, for example, the king in *Hamlet*. Modern texts invariably call him Claudius, but his name is never mentioned in the play – in performance he is only the King. The name Claudius appears just twice in the second quarto text and once in the folio, in a single stage direction for his first entrance: “*Enter Claudius King of Denmarke*”; in Q2 this is immediately followed by the speech heading *CLAUD*. In the folio the speech heading is simply *KING*. Why is he named Claudius, then; for whose benefit is the name included? The answer can only be, for Shakespeare's. It is, then, not an element of performance, but part of the creative process, and it eventually became part of the reading process. And the dumb show preceding the play within the play, a long and complex action, is represented in the book only as a long stage direction.

It is easy to show how different the texts of Shakespeare that have come down to us must be from what was presented on the popular stage. To begin with, they are, with a small number of exceptions, much too long, and would have been cut for performance, as the published texts regularly still are today. But they also would have undergone a good deal of rewriting, to turn them from acting scripts to literary texts – thus the second quarto of *Hamlet* declares on its title page that the book contains much more than the previous quarto, which is the right length (and has the appropriate stage directions) for what was performed. The publisher Humphrey Moseley, issuing a collection of the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher in 1647, declares that the volume includes “All that was *Acted*,

and all that was not; even the perfect full Originalls without the least mutilation" (1647, A4v). For this literary editor, performance mutilated the play, which was whole only in the authors' originals.

Ben Jonson took charge of the transformation of his plays into books, and added a good deal of material in the process. When, in his mid-forties, he produced his *Workes* in folio (1616) he was in effect declaring himself a classic author while he was still alive. Most folio *Works* were historical, philosophical, or scientific, and the authors were long dead. Even the early quartos of Jonson's plays look like editions of the classics, divided into acts and scenes, and with a good deal of paratextual material. The title page of Jonson's earliest quarto, *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1600), declares that it includes "more than hath been Publickely Spoken or Acted. With the severall Character of every Person" – there is a great deal more to the play in this form than you could experience in the theater. The book enabled Jonson to keep control of the play, as he could not do in the theater, extending the action, giving instructions for interpretation, managing the reader as he could not manage the actors.

Much in Jonson's printed texts, moreover, is addressed solely to readers: in addition to the numerous congratulatory poems prefacing the play quartos, from Jonson's own pen there are the extensive character sketches in the *dramatis personae* of *Every Man Out of His Humour*, the prefatory "needfull notes" and marginal citation of sources in *Sejanus*, the addresses to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in *Volpone* and to readers of *The Alchemist* urging them to be "understanders", the two epistles in *Catiline* "To the Reader in Ordinarie" and "To the Reader extraordinary" – Jonson, of course, conceives the latter to be his true audience. Perhaps most striking are the acrostic titles prefaced to *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, which show Jonson being playful in a way that could only be manifest in writing, and that, moreover, was not manifest when the book was read aloud. As "more than hath been Publickely Spoken or Acted" reveals, the printed texts contain much that was not included in the play in the theater – how much there is no way of knowing, but anyone who has worked on a production of a Jonson play knows how much cutting is required to return it to the stage. That is true of the surviving texts of Shakespeare plays too, as it must be of any play revised for publication where all that has survived is the published version.

In fact, the exclusive attention to Shakespeare, even among admirers of English Renaissance drama, is a relatively modern phenomenon. The first academic courses in Shakespeare were taught not in Britain, but at Harvard, as late as the 1870s. Oxford and Cambridge taught medieval literature, but it was assumed that students could read anything written later for themselves. Clearly this is wrong; there is a lot to learn. But in fact, to focus exclusively on Shakespeare, and moreover, in a modernized form, is to ignore what is most distinctive about the Elizabethan world, and that world was very different from ours. Therefore this is not a book of essays exclusively about Shakespeare. In so far as it deals with his work, it is about Shakespeare within the culture that produced him and in which he thrived. That world was unfamiliar and even frightening: witchcraft and the supernatural were treated not simply as poetic fancies but as facts of nature, religion was a pervasive and all too often literally a burning issue, the social hierarchy was everywhere visible and violations of it had real consequences, women were property and romance was rarely a feature of marriage. It was a world that few modern readers of Shakespeare would recognize or could imagine themselves in.

As is inevitable in any collection spanning a lifetime, there is a certain amount of repetition here. I have not revised these passages, nor edited them out.

A Note on Quotations

In quotations, u, v, i, j, and w have been normalised, and contractions have been expanded; otherwise, quotations are given as they appear in the editions cited. In the case of early books that do not include page numbers, citations are for the most part to signature numbers. Signatures are the marks placed by the printer at the beginning of each gathering, or section, to show how the book is organised. The marks are usually letters or combinations of letters, but they may also be symbols, such as asterisks or pilcrows.

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PART 1
Elizabethan Theory

The Poetics of Spectacle

1.

The theater of Inigo Jones was created for that most ephemeral of Renaissance genres, the court masque. Hymns of praise, instances of royal magnificence, spectacular fantasies, the form was, even in its own time, ambiguously regarded. “These Things are but Toyes,” said Bacon, “to come amongst such Serious Observations.”¹ Nevertheless, to Ben Jonson, classicist and moralist, masques were the vehicles of the most profound ethical statements, creating heroic roles for the leaders of society, and teaching virtue in the most direct way, by example. Every masque moved toward the moment when the masquers descended and took partners from the audience, annihilating the barrier between the ideal and the real, and including the court in its miraculous transformations. We may even feel in the Caroline masques of Aurelian Townshend, Thomas Carew, and Sir William Davenant a kind of mimetic magic, as if by the sheer force of poetry and spectacle incipient war and dissolution could be metamorphosed into harmony and peace.

What remains of the form to us is a diminished thing. Ben Jonson undertook to translate the momentary visions of permanence into a literary form, but most of a masque was not literature. If we can take the masque at all seriously, it is largely through Jonson’s efforts; his text appears the center about which the work of other artists—designer, composer, choreographer—revolved. This is an accident of time; for Jonson, a happy accident, considering his famous quarrel with his foremost collaborator. But to a contemporary spectator, the experience of a masque allowed no easy distinction among

¹ “Of Masques and Triumphs” (Bacon 1625, 223).

the creators of so elaborately composite a form. The “device” was the poet’s, but it required for its expression nearly every other art known to the age: painting, architecture, design, mechanics, lighting, music of both composer and performer, acting, choreography, and dancing both acrobatic and formal. Indeed, by far the largest part of a masque was taken up with the dancing, which could consume much of the night in a production whose text lasted barely an hour.

Nevertheless, to a certain extent the spectator’s view misled him, for the Stuart masque as a form was largely the creation of a unique collaboration in the history of the English stage, that of Inigo Jones and Ben Jonson. That their views often diverged is evident, and that Jones’s greatest triumphs were achieved after he and Jonson had parted company is undeniable. But the masque, whether as spectacle or poem, was the form in which both artists found their richest and most continuous means of expression, and for over twenty years, despite their quarrel, their joint creation displayed a remarkable degree of consistency and coherence. It is impossible, indeed, to understand the development of Inigo Jones’s theater apart from his collaboration with Jonson.

We might begin, then, with a consideration of how each artist viewed his work. The antithesis of spectacle and poem is an obvious one; but it becomes less clear and its implications grow more complex as we look at it in a Renaissance context. Let us start with two assertions about the nature of the masque. For Ben Jonson in 1631, “all representations, especially those of this nature in court, public spectacles, either have been or ought to be the mirrors of man’s life.”² On the contrary, “these shows,” said Inigo Jones in 1630, “are nothing else but pictures with Light and Motion.”³ Jonson and Jones at the bitter end of their collaboration seem at last to be enunciating the terms of their dispute with a classic antithesis; Jonson’s ethical assertion is set against Jones’s aesthetic vision, the revelation of moral truth against the manipulation of spectacular effects, the mirrors to instruct the spirit against the pictures to delight the eye.

2 Jonson 1969, *Love’s Triumph through Callipolis*, 1-3.

3 From *Tempe Restored*, by Inigo Jones and Aurelian Townshend, in Townshend 1912, 83.

It has been customary to view the collaboration in this way, and to say that the Caroline masque, freed of Jonson's moral pressure, degenerated into spectacle for its own sake, the unbridled exercise of Jones's scenic ingenuity pandering to the tastes of a decadent court. But let us now consider Jones on the *effect* of one of his pictures: his elaborate costume for Queen Henrietta Maria in Townshend's *Tempe Restored* has been devised, he says, "so that corporeal beauty, consisting in symmetry, colour, and certain unexpressable graces, shining in the Queen's majesty, may draw us to the contemplation of the beauty of the soul, unto which it hath analogy" (Townshend 1912, 99).

Jones's aesthetics, then, derive from good Platonic doctrine and have clear moral ends. And Jonson's moral mirror, even with its weight of medieval allegorical usage behind it, appears increasingly pictorial the more closely we examine it. Somewhere far behind Jonson's statement, certainly at least half-consciously, is Aristotle's assertion that drama is an imitation of an action. Linguistically we do not distinguish between action and its imitation: the verb for both is *act*. But Jonson has made a distinction, because an imitation of an action is not the same as a mirror of man's life. Imitation is an action, a mirror is not. In its way, Jonson's formulation is as aesthetically oriented as Jones's, and it exhibits, moreover, the Ramistical tendency to translate actions into things. Mirrors are not actions but things we look at; imitation requires an actor, someone to do the imitating: even Hamlet's mirror requires an *actor* to hold it up to nature. But Jonson's mirror requires only a viewer; or more precisely, the viewer and the actor are the same: what a man sees in it is his own life. The remark is a very precise statement of how Jonson conceived the masque to work. In such representations, he asserted, the court saw not an imitation of itself, but its true self; and so every masque moved toward the moment when masquer and spectator merged, joining in the great central dance, affirming thereby the identity of fictive and real.

Jones and Jonson, then, despite their famous quarrel, were working toward similar ends. Indeed, as D.J. Gordon has shown, the basic issue of the quarrel was not that their positions were antithetical but that they were so much the same. Each looked beneath the finished coalition of language and spectacle to claim

the primacy of invention for himself. Moreover, Renaissance critical terminology did not distinguish the poet's kind of invention from the designer's (Gordon 1949). Nor did the Renaissance critic assume that such a distinction could be made: *ut pictura poesis*, he asserted, unambiguously (if inaccurately) applying Horace's dictum. If pictures and words were inseparable in so simple a medium as verse, then to attempt to separate the visual elements from the verbal in any structure as complex as a Renaissance entertainment must clearly involve us in a considerable historical fallacy. The nature of the difficulty is adequately exemplified simply in the stage-set for such a work. The modern viewer tends to think of the stage as a frame enclosing backgrounds for dialogue and action. But Jones's masque machines are not stage sets in this sense. On the contrary, for the most part they are themselves the "action," providing the crucial developments and transformations, and it is the dialogue that is clearly ancillary, elucidating or moralising the spectacle.

But in a larger sense, in order to understand the spectacles of Inigo Jones we must remember that the antithesis between visual and verbal experience did not exist in the Renaissance, even for Jonson, in the way it does for us. "Whosoever loves not picture," said the poet in *Discoveries*, "is injurious to truth: and all the wisdom of poetry" (1083).⁴ There was for Jonson a basic connection between the image and the word, and truth was lost when picture was rejected.

For the Renaissance artist, the relation between verbal statements and visual representations was direct and unquestioned. On the one hand, every picture was a symbol. One might admire the sensuous qualities of a painting, but the significance of the work lay in its meaning, and this was invariably expressed in allegorical or symbolic terms. Pictures, that is, expressed in a visual fashion a meaning that was conceived verbally. Hence the age's intense interest in hieroglyphs: the oldest language, closest to the fount of wisdom, united the image and the word. On a less arcane level, the ubiquitous emblems and devices presented the Renaissance reader with verbal pictures of an exemplary moral nature. Initially, these were intended

4 The text of *Discoveries* cited throughout is that of Lorna Hutson, in Jonson 2012, vol. 7. Numbers in parentheses are line references to this edition.

to consist only of words; the first emblem writer, Andrea Alciato, defined an emblem as a pictorial epigram, a verbal image, and the first edition of his famous *Emblemata* (1531) was not designed to include illustrations. The pictures were added by Alciato's German publisher, and though they were a logical enough development of the original idea, they remained very much an addition: the pictorial part of the emblem is a function of the verbal part, and to interpret the picture correctly one must know how to "read" it.

But on the other hand, the concern with images is an aspect of Renaissance psychological theory shared by both Aristotelians and Platonists; and words, particularly to the latter, had a very dubious function in the intellectual process. Even for Aristotle, the mind knows only forms, and thought consists of forms which are received by the mind as images.⁵ Nevertheless, Aristotelian philosophy in the logical and metaphysical writings, and later as practiced by the Schoolmen, laid considerable stress on syntactic structures as the primary vehicles of meaning. Truth, to an Aristotelian, consisted of assertions, which could be dialectically defended or logically tested. Platonists had no such conviction, and in dealing with the relation of the mind to external reality emphasised not language but forms and Platonic Ideas, and these they invariably conceived as images. Hieroglyphs were first expounded in the service of neoplatonism; indeed, the word to a Platonist was not part of an assertion, but rather the name of an Idea, or image, or thing, and out of this grew a conviction that everything could be represented pictorially or schematically.⁶ The conviction was institutionalised in the work of the notorious Petrus Ramus, whose dichotomies and diagrams reduced the action of the intellect to a mere reflection of a world that had itself been reduced to a mere collection of things. Nevertheless, the Ramist's insistence on pictorialising language by schematising it is essentially the same as the impulse of Alciato's publisher to add illustrations to the *Emblemata*: pictures are the age's way of conceptualising abstractions. This is how the mind worked; "the

⁵ See, for example, *De Anima*, 431a, b.

⁶ Not, of course, in any simple way: it is also true that for Ficino the Word was higher than the Image. One could not express Platonic Ideas merely by drawing pictures of them.

conceits of the mind are Pictures of things, and the tongue is the Interpreter of those pictures,” said Jonson again in *Discoveries* (2128). The assumption behind this is that there is a direct relation between reality, pictures, and thought. We know through images. Indeed, Jonson’s Platonism carried him even further. As a poet, he was bound to assert that “the Pen is more noble, than the Pencill” (1514). But he continues almost at once, “Picture is the invention of Heaven: the most ancient, and most a kinne to Nature” (1523). Paradoxically, Jonson claims for the visual arts precisely that divinity that had constituted, for Sidney, the chief defence of poetry. The quarrel with Inigo Jones takes on a new colouring when we realise the extent of Jonson’s admiration for the marvels of picture. His testimony, though qualified, is unambiguous: “it doth so enter, and penetrate the inmost affection (being done by an excellent Artificer) as sometimes it orecomes the power of speech, and oratory” (1526).

What this means is that we cannot consider Jones’s spectacles apart from his poets’ texts. Jonson’s argument in their debate is essentially that of an emblem writer; not that the spectacle has no meaning, but that it is properly the *expression* of the meaning, the body of the work as the poetry is the soul. Jones, with a respectable array of philosophical and psychological opinion behind him, was maintaining in effect that it is visual experience that speaks most directly to the soul, that it is *images* that *mean*, and words that explain their meaning. It is probably fortunate that he did not have access to Jonson’s commonplace book, for he could, as we have seen, have cited the poet against himself.

The issues raised by the quarrel of poet and designer relate to the more special question of the function of visual experience in theatrical performances. Critical opinion in the Renaissance ranges from the assertion that spectacle was a mere distraction to the conviction that it was in fact the substance of theater. The latter view may appear perverse, but it became on the whole the dominant one. For example, it is simply assumed by Prospero when he opens the production of his masque with the admonition “No tongue. All eyes. Be silent” (4.1.59). The attention he commands is not aural but visual, that of eyes, not ears. The terms of the controversy can best be understood by a brief look at its Italian counterpart, in which the theoretical issues were more clearly enunciated, largely because

the problems involved were more directly practical. Dramas in sixteenth-century Italy were normally produced with *intermezzi* between each act. These were grotesque, comic or spectacular, and were regularly, until late in the century, unrelated to the main drama. The most elaborate scenic machinery was employed for the *intermezzi*, not for the play itself. The charge, therefore, that spectacle detracted from the seriousness of the drama was in Italy directly, though rarely explicitly, related to the fact that the two really were providing separate and competitive entertainments. Arguments in favour of spectacle tended perforce to ignore the question of the *intermezzi*, and to imply by the term “spectacle” simply the visual element of the drama itself, what we would call the “production.” And here they found good classical support, in Aristotle for theory, in Vitruvius for practice. From the *Poetics* they learned that “the fearsome and the piteous may arise from the spectacle” (1453b). The claim is modest enough, and Aristotle at once goes on to say that producing the catharsis in this way is inferior to producing it through the construction of the action. Nevertheless, this passage served for many critics as a considerable authority. Francesco Robortello’s influential commentary on Aristotle (1548) is indicative. Robortello points out that spectacle (“*apparatus*”) is the essence of drama, since it is the necessary expression of the work, and therefore must contain all the other parts defined by Aristotle – melody, diction, thought, character, plot (Robortello 1548, 57).⁷ Moreover, the effect of drama for Robortello derives from its power to evoke wonder or admiration through its depiction of the marvelous. All of this can be justified by reference to Aristotle, for whom wonder is the end of poetry, and drama is a form of poetry. Indeed according to the *Poetics*, “the marvelous is required in tragedy” (Aristotle 2013, 1460a), and all things – even impossibilities – that render the work more astounding are appropriate because of the wonder they evoke.⁸ Nevertheless, Robortello’s formulation, with its emphasis on spectacle, has clearly

7 A detailed analysis of the commentary by Bernard Weinberg is in Crane 1952, 319-48.

8 The best general discussion of the place of wonder in Renaissance drama is Cunningham 1960, 135-262.

moved very far from Aristotle's assumption that the construction of the action is the central element in drama.

Similarly, Castelvetro in 1570 assumes that the marvelous, with its ability to produce wonder, is the essence of drama, though this is not a point in its favour: it is only what makes drama appeal to the vulgar taste of the mob.⁹ And by 1594 Giovambattista Strozzi could argue that because tragedy effects the catharsis "through the marvels of representation and spectacle" — this is not argued, but simply assumed — it is therefore inferior to epic, which relies on poetry (Weinberg 1961, 685).

On the practical side, Vitruvius provided the necessary assurances that classical drama had employed scenic machinery; and certainly the classicising aspect of spectacular devices contributes a great deal to their fascination for the Renaissance. Thus there is a direct and paradoxical connection between the insistence that drama must observe the unities, becoming thereby rational and realistic, and the devotion to astonishing and fantastic stage effects. Vitruvius' chapter on theaters, however, proved disappointingly uninformative. It is for the most part concerned not with settings, but with acoustics, dimensions, the necessity for colonnades, and the like. The only scenic devices it discusses are the *periaktoi*, triangular pillars with a different scene painted on each side. "When the play is to be changed," says Vitruvius, "or when the gods enter to the accompaniment of claps of thunder, these may be revolved and present a face differently decorated" (1914, 150). The fact that there was more complex machinery on the ancient stage is suggested only later, in a chapter on machines and engines. Vitruvius remarks, in a tantalising aside, that such devices are used "in accordance with the customs of the stage . . . to please the eye of the people" (282).

Periaktoi, then, were apparently used not to indicate changes of scene, but a new play; possibly to suggest the genre of the drama being performed, so that the pillars would show a different face for tragedy, comedy or satire. They were also employed in some way as a spectacular device, increasing the wonder of the appearances of gods. It is important to observe that initially, moveable settings

⁹ See the analysis by Bernard Weinberg in Crane 1952, 349-71.

did not contribute to the realistic aspects of the drama. To use them realistically (for example, to indicate a change of place in a new scene) was a Renaissance innovation, though doubtless based on a misreading of the Vitruvian account. But it must be stressed that for the Renaissance spectator, the realistic and the marvelous—that which produced wonder, the end of drama—were neither antithetical nor, on the whole, even distinguishable. What was marvelous about spectacular machinery was precisely the realism of its illusions.

The idea that the function of stage machines was “to please the eye of the people” was elaborated by Sebastiano Serlio in 1545 in such a way that settings and machinery appear almost to take on an independent existence (given here in its Jacobean translation):

Among all the things that may be made by mens hands, thereby to yeeld admiration, pleasure to sight, and to content the fantasies of men; I think it is placing of a Scene, as it is shewed to your sight, where a man in a small place may see built by Carpenters or Masons, skilfull in Perspective worke, great Palaces, large Temples, and divers Houses, both neere and farre off; broad places filled with Houses, long streets cross with other wayes: tryumphant Arches, high Pillars or Columnes, Piramides, Obeliscens, and a thousand fayre things and buildings, adorned with innumerable lights . . . There you may see the bright shining Moone ascending only with her hornes, and already risen up, before the spectators are ware of, or once saw it ascend. In some other Scenes you may see the rising of the Sunne with his course about the world: and at the ending of the Comedie, you may see it goe downe most artificially, where at many beholders have bene abasht. And when occasion serveth, you shall by Arte see a God descending downe from Heaven; you also see some Comets and Stars shoot in the skyes . . . which things, as occasion serveth, are so pleasant to mens eyes, that a man could not see fairer made with mens hands. (1611, 24)¹⁰

For all its uncritical enthusiasm, Serlio does make some attempt to account for the effect of scenic machinery on the viewer: it produces admiration, or abashes the beholders. This is perfectly appropriate; the end of drama is wonder. The claim that scenes “content the

¹⁰ The anonymous translation, the first in English, was based on a Dutch version.

fantasies of men” is worth pausing over. The Italian reads “*contento d’animo*”; Serlio’s term is the general one for any of the intellectual or spiritual faculties. The English “fantasies” is both more technical and more precise. The fantasy is the faculty that receives images; it is also the power to create them. It thus combines the meanings of both perception and imagination; in contenting his fantasy, the spectator is both passive and active.

We should note that there is little suggestion in all this that the effectiveness of scenery is related to its use in a particular drama, or that it functions as an expression of the text. And where Vitruvius had merely implied that it was proper for public officials to provide people with shows and plays, for which machines are useful, such scenic displays take on for Serlio a significant social and political role, for they are the outward expressions of the magnanimity and liberality of princes:

The more such things cost, the more they are esteemed, for they are things which stately and great persons doe, which are enemies to niggardlinesse. This have I scene in some Scenes made by Ieronimo Genga, for the pleasure and delight of his lord and patron Francisco Maria, Duke of Urbin: wherein I saw so great liberalitie used by the Prince, and so good a conceit in the workeman, and so good Art and proportion in things therein represented, as ever I saw in all my life before. Oh good Lord, what magnificence was there to be scene . . . but I leave all these things to the discretion and consideration of the judicious workeman; which shall make all such things as their pattrons serve them, which they must worke after their owne devises, and never take care what it shall cost. (1611, fols. 24-6)

“This it is,” said Jonson the moralist in *Hymenaei*, “hath made the most royal princes and greatest persons, who are commonly the personators of these actions . . . studious of riches and magnificence in the outward celebration or show, which rightly becomes them” (10-14).

Jones’s work, then, is clearly a direct realisation of the most serious Renaissance dramatic theory, and of all the implications of Serlio’s account of stagecraft. Charges that he, or his audiences, were ever interested in spectacle “for its own sake” are ignorant of how complex a concept spectacle was in the period, and how

central the idea of wonder was to all Renaissance discussions of art in general, and of poetry in particular. The means of drama, the age asserted, was spectacle, its end was wonder, and the whole was an expression of the glory of princes. This is the theory behind all Jones's practice.

2.

So far as we know, Jones's first stages were devised for Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* on Twelfth Night 1605, and for four plays produced in the hall of Christ Church College, Oxford, during a royal visit eight months later. All of these had complex settings. The machinery for *Blackness* consisted of first a front curtain with a painted landscape, then an artificial sea with wave machines, the masquers being placed in a great shell "curiously made to move on those waters and rise with the billow," and for a final revelation, the appearance of the moon-goddess above the stage in a silver throne. These are the devices of *intermezzi*; for the plays in August Jones's practice was more classical. His texts were Robert Burton's neo-Latin pastoral *Alba*, a new tragedy of *Ajax Flagellifer*, Matthew Gwynne's allegorical comedy *Vertumnus*, and Samuel Daniel's *Arcadia Reformed*, the only play in English.¹¹ The last was for the benefit of the Queen, who did not understand Latin, and King James did not attend. The other three are Oxford's attempt to display its excellence in the three ancient genres. The first, *Alba*, was the satyr play, and appropriately included "five or six men almost naked, which were much disliked by the Queen and Ladies" (Nichols 1828, 1.548). For these classical texts Jones created what he understood to be a classical stage, with *periaktoi* and other scenic machines, so that (a spectator records) "not only for spectacles on different days, but also within a single play, new façades for the whole stage were made to appear with diversity and speed, to the amazement of everyone".¹² Or practically everyone;

¹¹ Subsequently published as *The Queen's Arcadia*.

¹² A full account of the visit is given (in Latin) by Wake 1607, and in Nichols 1828, 1.538ff. Jones's stage for the productions is discussed in Nicoll 1927, 127.

a spy from Cambridge reported that Jones had been hired to furnish “rare devices, but performed very little, to that which was expected” (1.558). Disappointing or not, this was a new kind of stage in England, and Jones’s sense of its potentialities may be gaged by comparing the settings for the tragedy and the comedy. In *Ajax Flagellifer* the scenes were first Troy and the Sigeian shore, then woods, wilderness, dreadful caves and the dwellings of the furies, and last a view of tents and ships. In *Vertumnus*, however, presumably in keeping with its allegorical mode, the stage contained representations of the four winds, and a palm tree in the center with twelve boughs, each bearing a light. Above this was the sun in a zodiac. There were two changes of setting – that is, three scenes – though no record remains of what they were. Apparently, then, Jones used his *periaktoi* to create a realistic Italian stage for the tragedy and an emblematic Elizabethan one for the comedy. What was similar about them was the really crucial innovation, the use of perspective for both.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider what an Oxford audience’s expectations would have been for this sort of play. The association between classical drama and scenic machines had been made in England at least as early as 1546, when John Dee constructed a flying device for a Cambridge production of Aristophanes’s *Peace*. This was so effective that there were dark mutterings of witchcraft, though it is difficult to see why, since such machines had been employed in Lord Mayors’ pageants and similar entertainments for many years. If this was a Vitruvian experiment,¹³ there is no evidence that it created a tradition. Nor is this especially surprising. University drama was essentially a verbal and rhetorical art providing for the spectator the same sorts of pleasures as formal debates and oratory – listening to debates was a favourite Elizabethan intellectual pastime. Obviously something about tastes was changing in 1605, since Oxford hired Jones to furnish the plays in the new fashion, and paid him the handsome sum of £50, which was more than he got from the court for the Christmas masque. But it was the court’s tastes that were changing, not the university’s, and the plays at Christ Church do

¹³ The suggestion was first made by Campbell 1923, 87, and subsequently by Yates 1969, 31-2.

not signal a new trend in Oxford drama. Indeed, so far as we know, the university did not see another drama on a perspective set with movable scenery until 1636, thirty-one years later, for another royal visit, and with Jones again, this time at the height of his success, creating the settings. For Oxford throughout the intervening years, drama remained basically a rhetorical form, and Jones's settings were thought of not as essential, but rather as providing their own additional and separate pleasures for the spectator. The university's commentators in 1605 did not conceive the new stage to have changed the character of the drama that was produced on it, or to be necessary, or even desirable, for future productions.

The special nature of such stages is worth emphasising. They were employed only at court or when royalty was present; they were not used in the public or private playhouses. The implications of this deserve more attention than they have received. Jones's stage subtly changed the character of both plays and masques by transforming *audiences* into *spectators*, fixing the viewer, and directing the theatrical experience toward the single point in the hall from which the perspective achieved its fullest effect, the royal throne. There is a reason behind the fact that Oxford employed perspective settings only in the presence of royalty: such a stage was truly appropriate only to the court. Through the use of perspective the monarch, always the ethical centre of court productions, became in a physical and emblematic way the centre as well. Jones's theater transformed its audience into a living and visible emblem of the aristocratic hierarchy: the closer one sat to the King, the "better" one's place was, and only the King's seat was perfect. It is no accident that perspective stages flourished at court and only at court, and that their appearance there coincided with the reappearance in England of the Divine Right of Kings as a serious political philosophy.¹⁴

Jones's stage was a radical and unfamiliar phenomenon for English audiences. The assumption behind it was that a theater is a

¹⁴ In contrast, for example, the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza, designed by Palladio and Scamozzi for an academy of social equals, has five perspectives running back from a stage wall along the radii of the elliptical hall. It thus provided every spectator with a perfect perspective.

machine for controlling the visual experience of the spectator, and that that experience is defined by the rules of perspective. Moreover, it is not simply the optical realism of the setting that is important, but the ability to change the settings, and thereby continually to exercise the spectacle's control over the audience. It is important to remember that these are assumptions about theaters, not plays: in principle any play may be presented on such a stage, and the separation of the theatrical and dramatic experiences for the spectator is clearly implied in all the contemporary accounts—and indeed, well into the Restoration.¹⁵ As Jones was employing them, changes of setting were not so much backgrounds for the action as they were *wonders* in plays. At Oxford in 1605 Jones was creating tiny spectacular *intermezzi* for his classical dramas.

The unfamiliarity of the principles behind Jones's stage may be measured by the bureaucratic difficulty that Oxford encountered when it attempted to apply them. In August, 1605, eight months after witnessing *The Masque of Blackness*, a group of court officials came to oversee the arrangements for the King's visit to the university. These functionaries "utterly disliked the stage at Christchurch, and above all the place appointed for the chair of Estate, because it was no higher, and the King so placed that the auditory could see but his cheek only." The university's vice-chancellor and his workmen undertook to explain the nature of illusionistic theater; they "maintained that by the art perspective the King should behold all better than if he sat higher." To the courtiers, however, the King was the spectacle – the spectators at a play were an "auditory," and the realities of the art perspective were irrelevant. "In the end, the place was removed, and sett in the midst of the Hall, but too far from the stage." Ironically, in the event, King James complained that he could not *hear* the play.¹⁶

From 1605 onward illusionistic stages were regularly used for the masque, but it was many years before the implications of this sort of theater were realised in the drama, or indeed, recognised at all. Not until the end of the 1630s do we begin to find assertions that spectacular settings affect the plays that are produced in them. In part such claims have an air of special pleading, the rationalisations

¹⁵ For example Dryden 1674, *Prologue*, 34ff.

¹⁶ The account is in Nichols 1828, 1.558.

of popular dramatists writing for the old-fashioned public stage. On the other hand, Peter Hausted, one of the least of the Sons of Ben, takes a firm Jonsonian line defending the lack of scenery in his adaptation of *Epicoene*, *The Rival Friends*, produced at Cambridge for a royal visit in 1632:

Our offense was the same that was imputed to Cicero . . . that it was *sauciness* in him amongst so many *Patricians* of eminent blood, to dare to be *vertuous* or *Eloquent*. I doe confesse we did not goe such quaint wayes as we might have done; we had none of those *Sea-artes*, knew not how, or else scorn'd to plant our *Canvas* so *advantagiously* to *catch* the *wayward breath* of the *Spectatours*; but freely and ingenuously labourd rather to *merit* then *ravish* an *Applause* from the *Theatre*. (A3r-v)

The terms of this are instructive: scenery, for Hausted, appeals to passion rather than judgment, and the dangerous effectiveness of such an appeal is amply indicated by his use of the word “ravish” to describe the experience. Both neoplatonists and neo-Aristotelians could have objected that ravishment is precisely the effect for which art is created: the response to beauty for Plato, like the end of poetry for Aristotle, is not judgment but wonder. Hence at court, in the same year, Mercury was admonishing the audience of the Christmas masque, Townshend’s *Albion’s Triumph*, that they might “admire, but censure not.” (l. 63). Hausted, in fact, is seeing the drama not as poetry but as a form of oratory or debate, the end of which is rational persuasion. Most significant for our purposes, however, is not the philosophical basis of the passage, but the necessity for an apology: in 1632 a play presented before the King was expected to have illusionistic scenery. William Strode at Oxford four years later produced a genial compromise by asserting that his allegory *The Floating Island* would, with Jones’s scenes, provide two equal and alternative pleasures for its royal audience:

Whether you come to see a play or hear,
Whether your censure sit in th’Eye or eare,
Fancy or *Judgement*, Carelesse of Event
We aime at Service; cannot misse th’Intent.
(A4r)

The radical charge that the new stage is positively anti-verbal is a rare and very late one, and highly inaccurate if we consider the court dramas of the 1630s. Nevertheless, it does appear as a justification for the lack of illusionistic scenery in the professional theaters. Thus the prologue to a Blackfriars play of about 1640, William Cavendish's *Country Captain*, posits a necessary relation between spectacular productions and incompetent poetry:

Gallants, I'll tell you what we do not mean
 To show you here a glorious painted scene,
 With various doors to stand instead of wit,
 Or richer clothes with lace, for lines well writ;
 Tailors and painters thus, your dear delights,
 May prove your poets only for your sight,
 Not understanding . . .
 (qtd in Harbage 1936, 152)

All this testifies more than anything else to a considerable uncertainty about the relation between visual and verbal experience in the theater. Looking backward in 1664, Richard Flecknoe thought he detected a transformation in the very nature of theater, from an auditory to a spectacular phenomenon:

Now for the difference between our Theatres and those of former times, they were but plain and simple, with no other Scenes nor Decorations of the Stage, but onely old Tapestry, and the Stage strew'd with Rushes, with their Habits accordingly, whereas ours now for cost and ornament are arriv'd to the height of Magnificence; but that which makes our Stage the better makes our Playes the worse perhaps, they striving now to make them more for sight than hearing.¹⁷

No doubt the audiences of Wycherley and Congreve would have been surprised to learn that modern drama was designed more for sight than for hearing; nevertheless, Flecknoe's perception of a new attitude toward the stage as a scenic machine is obviously valid. Davenant's *Playhouse to be Let* (c. 1660) may be taken as a prime example: it is an anthology of scenic possibilities, and its evident

¹⁷ *A Short Discourse of the English Stage* (1664), cited in Campbell 1923, 236.

enthusiasm is an index to the novelty of the idea that something other than rhetoric might be the substance of drama. This is the heritage of Jones's theater, though it is not a theater he ever knew or contemplated, and it derives from the adaptation of masque stages to the production of plays.

After the Oxford productions of 1605, Jones does not seem to have produced another play for over twenty years. His stage was developed for masques. But his handling of the two forms was always very different, and it is important for us to keep the distinction of the genres clearly in mind. A masque was not, to the Renaissance, a kind of drama. John Chamberlain in 1613 reported widespread criticism of Thomas Campion's *Lords' Masque* for being "more like a play than a masque", and conversely, Sir Dudley Carleton was especially pleased with Sir Philip Herbert's wedding masque in 1604, "which for songs and speeches was as goode as a play" (Chambers 1923, 3.377). The art of the stage designer is employed in both, but his function is not the same. The scenic machine is the setting for a play, and it may also provide its own momentary interludes of wonder as the drama pauses. But the scenic machine is the *action* of a masque, its metamorphoses, miracles, apotheoses. And despite the normal use of theatrical terminology in descriptions of masques — scene, stage, proscenium, etc.—the masquing hall was never referred to as a theater.

Plays are rhetorical structures and imitations of actions. Masques are, as Jones says in *Tempe Restored*, analogies: ideas made apprehensible, visible, real. Our tendency to confuse the two, and to take Jonson's side in the debate with his designer, has led us to assume, like Cavendish and Flecknoe, that the visual emphasis of Jones's theater made it also anti-verbal—in crude terms, that the taste for spectacle was what killed Shakespearean drama. But if we look at Jones's relation to his playwrights, and consider the dramas (not the masques) that were actually written to be produced on his stage — plays like Cartwright's *Royal Slave*, Montagu's *Shepherd's Paradise*, Carlell's *Passionate Lovers*, Strode's *Floating Island* — we shall find them not less but more rhetorical than plays for the public theater. Montagu's, indeed, despite at least nine changes of scene, was notorious for its longwindedness. The model for such dramas is the formal debate or the Platonic dialogue, and Jones's

stage was considered an appropriate setting for them. The relation between this sort of drama and Jones's scenic machines must lie partly in the sophisticated rationality of the settings they provided; but it is even more profoundly involved with the continuing assumption that the true end of drama is the production of wonder. Aristotelian pragmatism blends here into Platonic mysticism, for wonder is the quality that, in Platonic theory, leads the mind to the apprehension of truth,¹⁸ and Jones, as we have seen, is well aware of this. Illusionistic machinery for the dramatic stage first comes fully into its own, logically enough, when the drama becomes not only overtly philosophical but directly Platonic.

3.

In a sense the possibilities and implications of a theater like Jones's had already been explored in late Shakespearean drama. It is a commonplace to observe elements of the masque in these plays: Prospero's marvels, Posthumus' dream, the emblematic procession of knights in *Pericles*, Hermione's statue, Henry VIII's disguising. Indeed, the resolutions of both *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* are directly effected by illusionists, theatrical producers who control what the audiences within their plays see, and thereby believe. It is not accidental that the most palpable example we are shown of Prospero's art is a masque. The emphasis in all the late plays is on the awaking of wonder as the means to reconciliation and the restoration of losses, with a corresponding emphasis on visual and irrational experience. Pericles believes Marina not because of what he hears from her, but because of what he sees:

I will believe thee,
 And make my senses credit thy relation
 To points that seem impossible, for thou look'st
 Like one I loved indeed.
 (5.1.122-5)

¹⁸ See, for example, *Theataetus* 155d, though of course the wonder produced by dramatic spectacles is immediately excepted.

This is illogical, but seeing is believing, and specifically, believing the impossible. Analogously, *The Winter's Tale* stresses the validity not of reasonable explanations but of fantastic stories; truth is “like an old tale still.” Leontes’ salvation lies in his ability to believe that his son’s death is not the physical consequence of shock and grief, but a judgment sent from Apollo; that the restored Hermione has not simply been hidden for sixteen years but is a statue come to life. So the miraculous becomes fact, seeming becomes being, the ideal the real. Ben Jonson’s dubiety about spectacle and the art of Inigo Jones is directly related to his feelings about plays like *Pericles*:

No doubt a mouldy Tale,
 Like *Pericles*, and stale
 As the Shrives crusts, and nasty as his Fish,
 Scraps out of every Dish,
 Thrown forth and rak’d into the common Tub,
 May keep up the Play Club.¹⁹

Jonson for once was not a good enough Platonist to appreciate the central experience of wonder in *Pericles*. The old tale, with its appeals to the fantastic and irrational, strikes him as mindless and vulgar, rather than transcendent. Ironically, it is precisely the masque-like qualities of the drama that offend the greatest masque-writer of the age: such elements are inappropriate to plays, which for Jonson are still rhetorical structures or imitations of actions. But symbolic fables and miraculous resolutions are the substance of masques. Wonder, indeed, appears in person to control and define the miracles of Inigo Jones’s metamorphoses in Jonson’s *Vision of Delight*, becoming at last the agent of its idealisations and apotheoses: “How better than they are are all things made / By Wonder!” (ll. 159-60), exclaims Fantasy, at which, on a midwinter night in 1617, the Bower of Zephyrus opened to loud music, and the masquers were discovered as the Glories of the Spring.

It is the wonder of the spectators that is being invoked at such a moment. Their response plays an active role in the masque, not only through its allegorical embodiment in the figure of Wonder,

¹⁹ *Ode to Himself* (“Where dost thou carelesse lie”) ll. 21-6.

but more generally, in this as in all masques, through the audience's inclusion in the apotheosis. For it is the transformation of both masquer and spectator, of the whole court, that the masque as a form undertakes. The directing and ordering of the viewer's wonder is the means toward this transformation: "No tongue," says Prospero, "all eyes. Be silent." Around the heroic roles of Jonson's, Campion's, Davenant's poetry Jones created the palpable reality of a sensibly apprehensible world, and this, in turn, became the palace at Whitehall, the Banqueting House, the masquing room. When the spectators joined in dancing the revels, they were participating in the mimesis; and seeing beneath the disguise, recognising the identity of the masquers, was the first step toward understanding the wisdom they embodied, because it revealed the relation between the idealisation and the reality. This is the step that Ferdinand takes when, halfway through his masque, he asks Prospero, "May I be bold / To think these spirits?" (4.1.119-20).

Allegory, symbol and myth are the substance of masques. Courtiers are seen as heroes, kings as gods, actions as emblems, and meaning in this form is, in both the figurative and literal senses, dependent on how things *appear*. The viewers' understanding of the masque, moreover, depended on their ability to *read* what they saw. If they could not interpret the symbolism, as must almost invariably have been the case, it had to be explained to them, either in the dialogue or more often in the printed text of the work, as in *The Masque of Blackness*, or *Tempe Restored*. The fact that even this procedure was exceptional only means that we must not underestimate the Renaissance's love of mysteries and enigmas. To find oneself in the presence of mystic and impenetrable truths afforded considerable pleasure. That Jones should have relied, in so profoundly symbolic a form, on the realistic properties of perspective is an important index to his sensibility and that of the age as a whole. It suggests to begin with that the "realness" of perspective lay less in its naturalism than in its power to project something that was recognised to be an illusion. For such an effect to be successful, a certain sophistication is required of the viewer's perception as well as of the designer's skill: one must learn not only how to devise perspective scenes, but also how to read them. Straight lines on a page moving upward and converging will appear

to recede to a vanishing point only if we have learned the rules for translating three-dimensional images into two dimensions and back again; otherwise the lines will simply appear to move upward and converge. The evidence indicates that Jones had to deal with an untrained audience who were not, moreover, quick learners.

We have already remarked that courtiers who had witnessed *The Masque of Blackness* in January 1605 were still unfamiliar with the principles of perspective at Oxford the next August. We might compare Jonson's description of Jones's marine setting for *Blackness* with that of a member of the audience. Jonson writes,

an artificial sea was seen to shoot forth, as if it flowed to the land, raised with waves which seemed to move, and in some places the billow to break, as imitating that orderly disorder which is common in nature. In front of this sea were placed six tritons in moving and sprightly actions. . . . Behind these a pair of sea- maids, for song, were as conspicuously seated; between which two great sea-horses, as big as the life, put forth themselves, the one mounting aloft and writhing his head from the other, which seemed to sink forwards. . . . The masquers were placed in a great concave shell like mother of pearl, curiously made to move on those waters and rise with the billow. (21ff.)

Here is what Sir Dudley Carleton saw:

There was a great Engine at the lower end of the Room, which had Motion, and in it were the Images of Sea-Horses with other terrible Fishes, which were ridden by Moors: the Indecorum was, that there was all Fish and no water. At the further end was a great Shell in the form of a Skallop, wherein were four Seats; on the lowest sat the Queen . . . (Jonson 1925-1952, 10.448)

Doubtless we must make some allowances for Carleton's sense of humour; nevertheless it is clear that this account cannot be treated, as commentators have done, merely as a perverse joke. To begin with, the setting does not seem to Carleton a stage; it is "an Engine at the lower end of the Room". Where Jonson saw a sea so artfully devised that the great shell moved on it and rose with the swell of the waves, what Carleton saw was "all Fish and no water." What Carleton describes, in fact, is not an Italianate perspective scene,

but a traditional English pageant car and a number of attendant devices that happen to be grouped at one end of the hall. But also, what Carleton sees is precisely what is there; only he does not interpret it as its designer intends it to be interpreted.

Thirty-one years later, in 1636, here is what Antony à Wood reported that a Cambridge spectator said he had seen at Jones's production of William Strode's *Floating Island*:

It was acted on a goodly stage reaching from the upper end of the Hall almost to the hearth place, and three or four openings on each side thereof, and partitions between them, much resembling the desks or studies in a Library, out of which the Actors issued forth. The said partitions they could draw in and out at their pleasure upon a sudden, and thrust out new in their places according to the nature of the Screen, whereon were represented Churches, Dwellinghouses, Palaces, etc. which for its variety bred very great admiration. (Jonson 1925-1952, 10.410-11)²⁰

Clearly Wood's source is richly appreciative of the ingenuity of Jones's settings, and if the end of drama is wonder, the architect has done the poet's work well for him. Nevertheless, what the spectator is seeing is apparently not quite what he is intended to see. The side wings of Jones's perspective scene look, in this account, like "the desks or studies in a Library"; instead of reading the set as an uninterrupted receding perspective, the observer sees, like Carleton in 1605, exactly and only what is there: a number of individual flats arranged in two rows on either side of the stage.

But the mimetic effects toward which Jones was working depended not only on an audience with educated eyes. It depended as well on certain assumptions about the nature of the artist: that his power was the power to project illusions, but that these had meaning and moral force; that seeing was believing, and that art could give us a vision of the good and the true; that the illusion represented, in short, a Platonic reality. In the same way, the masque was for Jonson a form of idealising poetry. The sorts of contexts and personae he provided for his masquers were realisations of those he created for the

²⁰ The account, however, must be second-hand, since Wood was three years old in 1636.

heroes of his society in works like the epistle to Sir Robert Wroth, *To Penshurst*, and the several addresses to the Countess of Bedford. The creation of exemplary roles for the leaders of the culture was one of the highest acts the Renaissance poet could perform, and in treating the masque as a poem Jonson was also preserving from oblivion the heroic virtues he had thus embodied. So much Jonson himself tells us in the preface to *Hymenaei*. But there is a more complex aspect of the masque, less rational and overt, that was, as we have seen, an equally large element in the form's meaning for the age. "Though their voice be taught to sound to present occasions," says Jonson, "their sense or doth or should always lay hold on more removed mysteries." (Jonson 1969, *Hymenaei*, 15-17). The emphasis on mystic symbols, on charms and incantations, and particularly on metamorphoses and miraculous transformations in seeming defiance of the laws of time or gravity suggests an ultimate vision that partakes of the magical. Nevertheless, we need a better word than magic to describe what Jones's theatre was doing. It was not magic precisely because it required so completely the collusion of the observers: their wit and understanding made the miracles and metamorphoses possible. If anyone is *deceived*, the effect has failed. Even John Dee, in 1546, had had only amused condescension for those who thought the ascent of his cloud machine was really magical.

The better word is, perhaps, scientific. For the masque is the form that most consistently projects a world in which all the laws of nature have been understood and the attacks of mutability defeated by the rational power of the mind. Nature in the masque is the nature envisioned by Baconian science; its pastorals embody not innocence but the fullest richness of experience, not contemplation but the widest range of action. The heroic dead return, humankind enters a golden age and moves with perfect ease from earth to heaven; and most to the point, this vision, at its climactic moment, includes us, the mortal spectators: we too are transformed by the power of knowledge and reason. Every masque is a ritual in which the society affirms its wisdom and asserts its control of its world and its destiny. The glories of the transformation scene express the power of princes, bringing order to human and elemental nature, partaking thereby of the divine. The court and the aristocratic hierarchy expand and become the world, and the King in turn

is abstracted—to Pan the universal god, to the life-giving sun, to Hesperus the evening star, or even, in an extraordinary example, to a physical principle, pure potential, through whom the ultimate scientific mysteries of perpetual motion and infinite power are finally solved:

Not that we think you weary be,
 For he
 That did this motion give,
 And made it so long live,
 Could likewise give it perpetuity.
 Nor that we doubt you have not more,
 And store
 Of changes to delight;
 For they are infinite,
 As is the power that brought those forth before.
 (Jonson 1969, 318-27).

If this sort of claim appears extravagant, it will seem less so if we set it beside a philosophical assertion that is not involved with the patronage of kings and the society of courts. Here is Marsilio Ficino, discussing Archimedean mechanical models of the heavenly spheres:

Since man has observed the order of the heavens, when they move, whither they proceed and with what measures, and what they produce, who could deny that man possesses as it were almost the same genius as the Author of the heavens? And who could deny that man could also make the heavens, could he only obtain the instruments and the heavenly material, since even now he makes them, though of a different material, but still with a very similar order? (1944, 235)

Jonson's assertion of the infinite power of the mind to create and control looks less like flattery in such a context.

The control is expressed on every level, through the rich formality of the celebratory verse, the harmony of music, the movement of dance; but most of all, through Inigo Jones's ability to do the impossible. The exchequer records testify to the extent of the crown's investment in such assertions; that they came at the season

of renewal and epiphany is not accidental. Nor is it surprising that Jones's talents found their most receptive patron in King Charles, whose visions of a harmonious commonwealth were substantiated only in the realities of the theatrical machine. The illusionist's control over the way we look at things was an important instrument of royal policy—or at least the King was under the illusion that it was.

Other spectators had their doubts. A year after Charles's execution, the creator of the most famous English masque, Milton the iconoclast, undertook to demolish not only the late king's claims but even his "conceited portraiture", the literal *Eikon Basilike*, "before his book, drawn out to the full measure of a masking scene, and set there to catch fools and silly gazers" (Figure 1). In the picture prefixed to the royal apology the king kneels before an altar in the entrance to a chapel; he holds a crown of thorns called *grace*; his earthly crown, *splendid but heavy*, lies discarded. His gaze is on a third crown, *glory*, appearing in the heavens. Outside, a distant landscape presents two personified winds, stormclouds, a raging sea. From the clouds a shaft of brightness, *more light out of darkness*, extends to the king's head. In the sea a rock stands, *unmoved, triumphant*. A nearby field contains two palm trees, emblems of peace; one is hung with weights, and its motto reads *Virtue grows greater under burdens*.

"But quaint emblems and devices", argued Milton, "begged from the old pageantry of some Twelfthnight's entertainment at Whitehall, will do but ill to make a saint or martyr." (Milton 1649, A8v). This registers, certainly, a Puritan's distaste for Laudian Anglicanism with its emphasis on display and ceremony, outward and visible signs. But it also reveals that the author of *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle* had a clear and accurate sense of how masques worked and what they undertook to do. The mechanics of idealisation are under attack here. What Milton decries as the Commonwealth triumphs is the art of Inigo Jones, the power to create a hero by controlling the way we look at a man.



Fig. 1: *Eikon Basilike*, frontispice

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Shakespeare and the Kinds of Drama

1.

When Samuel Johnson, citing the authority of Thomas Rymer, asserted that Shakespeare's natural disposition was for comedy, not tragedy, he was assuming that there were only two genres of drama: comedy and tragedy. The assumption was made apparently without strain and without any sense that its categories imposed undue limitations on the practice of either drama or criticism. Shakespeare was allowed to violate the rules, excused by his ignorance of them, and was praised for his fidelity to nature:

Shakespeare's plays are not, in the rigorous or critical sense, either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow. . . in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend." (Johnson 1765, xiii.)

If we look closely at Johnson's "distinct kind," we shall see that it is not a new genre but a mixture of the two old ones: the kinds remain comedy and tragedy.

For Diderot, however, writing at the same time (though for a culture that admittedly had always taken its categories more seriously than the British), there was more to life, even to dramatic and critical life, than comedy and tragedy. Diderot therefore, in the *Essai de la poesie dramatique* (1758), proposed a third genre, a serious bourgeois drama of a sort that could not be described within the limits of either of the traditional kinds. In doing this, Diderot assumed that he was doing something new and that the old forms could not express certain types of experience that were growing increasingly important for the arts.

To both critics, as to multitudes before and since, comedy and tragedy constituted a dichotomy, a pair of alternatives, that together, whether fortunately or not, comprised the whole that was drama. My essay may be described as a walk round this dichotomy. The text from which Johnson was working, the Shakespeare folio, did in fact contain a third genre: the history. But “History,” wrote Johnson, “was a series of actions, with no other than chronological succession, independent of each other, and without any tendency to introduce or regulate the conclusion. . . . As it had no plan, it had no limits.” (1765, xvi.) Now this claim is, of course, incorrect, as anyone who has compared the history plays with their sources will be aware; but the important point for my purposes is the assumption that if a play is not comedy or tragedy, it is merely chronology and possesses no structure at all.

The implications of such a view are worth pausing over, for the notion that drama is a whole dichotomised into comedy and tragedy, eccentric or limited as it may appear when stated as a thesis, in fact underlies a good deal of our own thinking about theatrical forms. We can perceive this notion whenever we assume that comedy is an alternative to tragedy as we do, for example, when we ask a question like “Is Beckett’s world view essentially comic or tragic?” The fact that this seems a perfectly sensible question (as it does, at least, to me) tells a good deal about our view of drama. We can see much more clearly the limitations imposed by a critic who asks whether Pope’s impulse in the *Iliad* was essentially epic or lyric. Why are these categories being presented as alternatives? Why should we assume that one excludes the other? Pope was, in his own time, attacked with just this dichotomy – “A pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer”¹ – but the criticism now strikes us as narrow and misguided.

Firm as the dramatic dichotomy was for the eighteenth-century critic, it proved to be of little value in analyzing Shakespearean drama. Most of the plays, as Johnson says, partake of both comedy and tragedy, and some could as easily be called one as the other: neoclassicism had to forget about the rules when dealing with

1 The critique is ascribed to Richard Bentley, but the story is certainly apocryphal.

Shakespeare. And in fact, though the genres had initially been invoked to categorise Shakespeare's "natural disposition" for comedy, generic questions do not figure significantly in Johnson's subsequent discussion. Nevertheless, the categories, however one chose to define them, had always been crucial to the critic's sense of Shakespeare, and it is probably a measure of Johnson's independence that he was willing finally to set the question aside; for it had descended to him not only from commentators like Rymer but from the first folio itself.

Heminges and Condell's decision to organise the plays according to genre in the first folio was a more radical one than we may be able to appreciate from this distance, though most critics have at some point observed that it was a decision with which the plays themselves are not entirely comfortable. Thus *Troilus and Cressida* is a tragedy in the folio, although the quarto declares it as witty "as the best comedy in Terence or Plautus," and *Cymbeline*, despite its concluding reconciliations and happy marriage, appears among the tragedies as well. Mere convenience no doubt had much to do with the folio's arrangement: but why was this arrangement deemed especially convenient? Our filing systems tell a good deal about our minds; Ben Jonson, for comparison, compiling his plays for the 1616 volume of his *Workes* (the only English precedent for Shakespeare's editors), identified them by genre on their half-title pages but arranged them according to chronology. Jonson sees his plays, moreover, as belonging to all three of the ancient genres: there are tragedies, like *Sejanus*, comedies, like *Volpone*, and "comicall satyres," like *The Poetaster*. Generic arrangement seemed appropriate to Jonson only for his poetry, where "the ripest of my studies," the *Epigrams*, appear alone as a separate group.

Some of the Shakespearean chronology would doubtless have been forgotten by 1623, so a Jonsonian arrangement for the plays would probably have been impracticable; and associating all the plays according to their subject matter, which was the system employed for those concerned with most (but not all) English history, might well have proved excessively arbitrary. But just as grouping his epigrams together under the rubric of the classical genre seemed to Jonson to confer a special dignity on his favourite poems, so the genres themselves, at any rate those of comedy and

tragedy, must also have had the attraction of classical forms for Shakespeare's first editors, conferring the dignity of ancient drama on the work of their fellow actor.

The assumption that genres themselves have value and confer dignity implies that genres possess a reality independent of particular examples and are not simply classifications but carry with them measures of value. I shall return to the question of drama as a dichotomy, but I now wish to consider the notion of genres as value judgments. I begin with two famous critical examples, written a century apart. Sir Philip Sidney complained that the English dramatists of his age failed to observe the rules of generic composition. Despite an exception made for *Gorboduc*, he found even that play "very defectious in the circumstances . . . For it is faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporall actions". Other modern tragedies offended even more blatantly against the decorum of the genre, "where you shal haue *Asia* of the one side, and *Affrick* of the other, and so many other vnder-kingdoms, that the Player, when he commeth in, must euer begin with telling where he is, or els the tale wil not be conceiued." (1595, K1r). The passage then proceeds to parody the excesses of the tragic stage in Sidney's time. What I find noteworthy in all this is that for Sidney, however grotesque the dramas become, the genre remains capacious enough to contain them. The deficiencies of *Gorboduc* only make the play deficient; they do not banish it from the category of tragedy. The form itself is a good thing, but the classification is essentially descriptive: it is good to have tragedies, but bad tragedies are still tragedies.

For Thomas Rymer, a century later, the genre had no such breadth. *Othello*, he says, is held to be the model of tragedy in his time:

From all the Tragedies acted on our English Stage, *Othello* is said to bear the Bell away. The Moral, sure, is very instructive. First, This may be a caution to all Maidens of Quality how, without their Parents consent, they run away with Blackamoors. . . . Secondly, This may be a warning to all good Wives, that they look well to their Linnen. Thirdly, This may be a lesson to Husbands, that before their Jealousie be Tragical, the proofs may be Mathematical. (1693, 89)

After an exhaustive discussion of the play, Rymer concludes by asking

What can remain with the Audience to carry home with them from this sort of Poetry, for their use and edification? how can it work, unless (instead of settling the mind, and purging our passions) to delude our senses? . . . the tragical part is, plainly none other, than a Bloody Farce, without salt or savour. (1693, 146)

And finally the play is indicted for contributing to the general decay of the arts: “when some senceless trifling tale, as that of *Othello* . . . impiously assumes the sacred name of Tragedy, it is no wonder if the Theatre grow corrupt and scandalous, and Poetry from its Ancient Reputation and Dignity, is sunk to the utmost Contempt and Derision.” (Rymer 1693, 164.)

The argument here is not that the ambiguous moral and the triviality of the plot render *Othello* a bad tragedy. The play “impiously assumes the sacred name,” but it is really not a tragedy at all: it is a farce. For Rymer—just as for Heminges and Condell—the genre itself conferred a value; and it was a value that Rymer was unwilling to see conferred upon *Othello*; or, as he puts it, to see *Othello* confer upon itself.

It was clear to Johnson that Rymer’s effort was misguided, at least in so far as the effort was directed at Shakespeare; but Rymer’s assumptions still commonly inform modern notions of dramatic genre. Comedies for us may be high or low and remain comedies, but those that are either not funny enough or too serious we remove from the category: hence *Measure for Measure* becomes a problem play, *The Winter’s Tale* a romance. On the other hand, comedies may be demoted for not being serious enough: what Feydeau wrote was not comedy but farce. *The London Merchant* and *Arden of Feversham* are domestic tragedies: here the term is a backhanded compliment since tragedy really ought not to be domestic. When T.S. Eliot in 1919 addressed himself to the question of whether or not *Catiline* and *Sejanus* were tragedies, he was replying to critics who assumed that by denying the plays a place in the genre, they had thereby demonstrated Ben Jonson’s inadequacy as a playwright. Eliot adopts a stance that is shared by both Sidney and Johnson:

To say that he failed because his genius was unsuited to tragedy is to tell us nothing at all. Jonson did not write a good tragedy, but we can see no reason why he should not have written one. If two plays so different as *The Tempest* and *The Silent Woman* are both comedies, surely the category of tragedy could be made wide enough to include something possible for Jonson to have done. But the classification of tragedy and comedy, while it may be sufficient to mark the distinction in a dramatic literature of more rigid form and treatment—it may distinguish Aristophanes from Euripides—is not adequate to a drama of such variations as the Elizabethans. Tragedy is a crude classification for plays so different in their tone as *Macbeth*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *The Witch of Edmonton*; and it does not help us much to say that *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Alchemist* are comedies. Jonson had his own scale, his own instrument. (1950, 128-9)

This admittedly begs some large questions—Jonson’s “own scale, his own instrument” was, after all, one that took the categories very seriously. But Eliot’s solution, characteristically double-edged, simultaneously enlarges the problematic genre and declares it irrelevant.

When Theodore Dreiser chose to call a novel *An American Tragedy*, he was assuming, like Hemingues and Condell, like Rymer, that the generic term itself conferred a value on the work: the title at once dignifies the form (tragedy is a more noble enterprise than the novel), the story, and America as well—it asserts that we too are capable of so grand a thing as tragedy. An impressive young critic, reviewing the book when it appeared in 1925, attacked Dreiser on precisely these grounds:

An American Tragedy is not a tragedy. Aristotle was right (as, indeed, why should he not have been in so simple a matter?) when he observed that effective tragedies have noble men for their heroes. Now, Clyde Griffiths is, not to mince words, a moron. This certainly does not preclude him from the boon of your pity, but your pity is of a sort that a limed bird evokes. “Pity and terror,” said the Stagirite, but there is pity and pity, and one variety of the emotion is a little unclean, certainly not ennobling. As for terror, there is no height here, there can be no fall; when this pitiful sharpy prepares his doom there can be no ominous sound of the beating

on hollow mountains to presage the event. There can be no piling up of fateful thunderheads, no sense of heavy calamity to come. What you get . . . is a sense of worry— nagging, querulous worry as the ignorant Clyde seeks some contraceptive or abortive device, as eventually he carries out, with the courage legendarily ascribed to the cornered rat, the brutal and atrocious murder. The book . . . is immensely, overwhelmingly pathetic; it is not a tragedy.²

This is Lionel Trilling at the age of twenty, quite as self-confident as Sidney at twenty-five, and deriving a good deal of his self-confidence from a firm faith in the realities of genre. That wonderfully condescending parenthesis at the beginning, indeed, employs an authentically Sidneian gambit: compare the Elizabethan critic's argument that the amount of time encompassed by a drama "should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day." The rules, such critics maintain, are plain common sense. But the generic argument in both cases is in fact an argument from authority; and for all the accuracy of its observation, the real critical effort of Trilling's review is in finding the right category for *An American Tragedy*, in determining that it is not tragic but something less artistically respectable, pathetic. The effort, finally, is more Rymer's than Sidney's.

Similar arguments were advanced against the claims of *Death of a Salesman* to have achieved the status of tragedy. The grounds of the attack were that Willy Loman was the wrong kind of protagonist ("Hero! Why he isn't even a good salesman," Mark van Doren indignantly told me when I admitted that I had been to see the play and liked it); and analogous examples appear constantly in movie and theatre reviews. As a concluding modern instance, we might cite a now classic critical text, Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, that epic attempt to rescue generic criticism from value judgments, which fifty years later appears only a brilliant and infinitely subtle monument to the proliferation of categories.

² Lionel Trilling's review first appeared in *Columbia Varsity* in 1926; it was reprinted (by me, to his chagrin, when I was editor) in *Columbia Review* 35 (1955, 46).

2.

It is obvious that with the difference between Sidney and Rymer we have the record of a transformation in cultural attitudes that had important effects on the practice of both criticism and dramaturgy. We can point, for example, to a number of related developments in the period: the institutionalisation of the genres in the rule-making authority of quasi-judicial bodies like the Académie Française; the increasing importance in England of dramatic censorship on the one hand but, on the other, the increasingly powerful sponsorship of the stage by the court and the growing protection of royal authority; and, throughout Europe, the rapid centralisation of the arts under the crown, where they became significant aspects of royal power and magnificence. But to view the question merely as a historical progression (and, as I have presented it, as one moving downward) is to consider it too narrowly. Criticism is, in its broadest sense, any response to a work of art; and generic criticism is not limited to professional critics. The genres had real vitality for the drama, a vitality which has not been historically delimited. For a critic like Rymer the genres were no doubt a dead hand; but surely we should look further—for example, to Davenant and Dryden, Purcell and Hogarth—before we decide that the notions of comedy and tragedy had become liminary for the critics of even Rymer's era.

I have chosen for my first example a perverse one: the most notorious of Renaissance categorisers, Julius Caesar Scaliger. By beginning with some passages from Scaliger's *Poetics*—in its own time both famous and infamous, since then largely scorned or ignored—I can indicate the breadth and usefulness of the categories for the Renaissance critic.

Scaliger begins, naturally, with Aristotle on tragedy. He says he has no wish to impugn the classic definition but will merely add his own:

Tragedy is the imitation through action [i.e., not through narration] of an important man's fortunes, with an unhappy outcome, and expressed in serious poetic language. Although Aristotle includes melody and song, they are not, as philosophers would say, of the

essence of tragedy Moreover, the term catharsis does not at all describe the effect of every plot.” (1581, 28-9).³

Scaliger, that is, finds Aristotle too limiting, and he expands the boundaries of the definition on pragmatic grounds. Melody and song are considered inessential because the printed version of a tragedy does not cease to be a tragedy. This observation, like the remark about catharsis, to which I shall return, exhibits Scaliger in one of his most characteristic modes: he is exceedingly literalistic, and the critical doctrine that means most to him is his own common sense.

Later in his *Poetics*, Scaliger proceeds to give his own account of the dramatic genres:

Though tragedy is similar to epic, it differs in that it rarely admits the lower classes, such as messengers, merchants, sailors, and the like. On the other hand, in comedies there are never kings, except in a few cases, such as the *Amphitruo* of Plautus. I am really speaking now of plays with Greek characters [i.e., such as those of Plautus and Terence], for the later Latin playwrights included Roman characters dignified by togas and royal robes. The lively characters of satyr plays are drunken, witty, cheerful, sarcastic. Mimes include cloth workers, shoemakers, butchers, chicken farmers, fishmongers, vegetable growers—figures whom, indeed, Old Comedy did not exclude. . . . Tragedy and comedy have the same mode of representation but are different in subject matter and organization. The subjects of tragedy are great, terrible things—royal commands, slaughter, despair, suicide, exile, bereavement, parricide, incest, fires, battles, blindings, weeping, moaning, funerals, eulogies, dirges. In comedy there are games, revels, weddings, carousing, slaves’ tricks, drunkenness, old men deceived and swindled of their money. (366-67)

Scaliger continues, describing satyr plays and mimes in the same way, and then turns to the nature of dramatic action:

Now a tragedy, if it is really a proper tragedy, is entirely serious. . . . However, many comedies have unhappy endings for some of the characters; this is true of Plautus’s *Miles Gloriosus*, *Asinaria*, *Persa*,

³ Here and elsewhere, my translation. All further citations to this work appear in the text.

and others. In the same way, there are a number of happy tragedies: in Euripides' *Electra*, except for the death of Aegisthus, there is joy for many; *Ion* has a happy ending as does *Helen*. Then too, although Aeschylus's *Eumenides* contains tragic elements (such as murders and the furies), its structure is more like that of a comedy: the beginning [in *Agamemnon*] is joyful for the guard, though troubling for Clytemnestra because of her husband's arrival; then comes the murder [of Clytemnestra], and Electra and Orestes are happy; the ending is happy for everyone—Apollo, Orestes, the populace, Pallas, the Eumenides. Thus it is by no means true, as we have always been taught, that tragedy must have an unhappy ending: it need only include terrible things. (367)

Scaliger himself had stipulated earlier that tragedy have an unhappy ending, but the requirement is withdrawn here on empirical grounds.

The question of the unities is related for Scaliger both to the problem of verisimilitude and to the function of drama generally:

The events themselves should be so organized that they approach as nearly as possible to the truth, for the play must not be performed merely so that the spectators may either admire or be overwhelmed (as the critics say used to be true of Aeschylus's drama), but to teach, move and delight. We are pleased with joking, as in comedy, or with serious things, if they are properly treated. Most men, however, detest lies. Therefore those battles at Thebes, and those sieges that are concluded in two hours, do not please me, nor is any poet wise who undertakes to complete the journey from Delphi to Athens or Athens to Thebes in a moment of time. Thus in Aeschylus, Agamemnon is killed and immediately buried, so quickly that the actor scarcely has time to catch his breath. Nor can the scene where Hercules throws Lichas into the sea be condoned, for there is no way of representing it without disgracing the truth. (368)

A good deal of Scaliger's discussion is obviously relevant to Sidney. The genres for such Renaissance critics were not sets of rules but classifications, ways of organising our knowledge of the past so that we may understand our relation to it and locate its virtues in ourselves. The ancient world, says Scaliger's *Poetics*, is not a world of monuments. It is real and recoverable, and the process of creation is also a process of re-creation. (Such an assertion

comes appropriately from a man who apparently invented his family history and christened himself Julius Caesar.) Very little of Scaliger's immense treatise is devoted to theory as such; his sense of his categories derives from an exhaustive consideration of particular examples. Critical theories, indeed, are constantly being faulted or dismissed because they fail to account for the realities of dramatic texts: the only authorities Scaliger takes seriously are the works themselves, and he has a great variety of ways of associating and comparing them—by kinds of subject matter, kinds of structure, kinds of denouement; but also by poetic and stylistic devices, the various uses of the chorus, even the relation of the title to the action.

Clearly for a critic like Scaliger, the process of classification constitutes the essence of criticism. On the other hand, his actual responses to the dramas he is classifying tend to be relentlessly superficial: both Scaliger and Sidney are eloquent on the wonders of poetry, but neither is capable of the minimally imaginative effort required by plays which ignore the unities of place or time. Sidney calls such plays preposterous, Scaliger calls them lies. Behind these judgments, obviously, are assumptions about the nature of representation and imitation so limited that they ought to prove crippling for any practical critic. But here the categories become crucial for the Renaissance mind: if we keep our eye on the genres, we shall see that they do not exclude even preposterous or mendacious examples—particular defects are, in fact, of very little significance. There are better plays and worse ones, but the genres constitute a complete system and have room for all. Scaliger's sense of individual works is often exceedingly narrow; but his sense of his categories is, in comparison with ours, generous and capacious.

Scaliger is an important figure for my purposes because his attitude toward genre is so dependent on the particular. His categories constitute basically a filing system, and the system reveals primarily relationships between works, and only incidentally judgments about them. Not that Scaliger is innocent of judgment: he has strong ideas about how drama should be written and does not hesitate to express them. But the judgments derive from the categories only in the sense that comparisons of similar works enable us to see which ones are best and what is best about them. The genres allow us to compare; it is the comparisons and

the models they provide that are important. (Indeed, Book 5 of the *Poetics*, entitled *Criticism*, consists of nothing but comparisons—of Greek with Latin writers, of Homer with Virgil, of Virgil with other Greeks, of Latin writers with each other, of descriptions of epic and tragic subjects such as tempests, plagues, and assorted disasters, of accounts of animals, mythological figures, natural wonders, of more disasters, of Lucan with Nicander, and finally of a variety of other poetical passages which seem not to fit into any of the earlier categories and are presumably being filed under *misc*).

It is apparent from even the brief selections I have cited that for all Scaliger's sense of detail, he has very little interest in *how* drama works. The best plays teach, move, and delight, he says, but this quality is felt to be simply a function of their verisimilitude. And the doctrine of catharsis, the mainstay of most Renaissance theories of tragedy, he rejects out of hand. In part, of course, Scaliger is exhibiting here merely the defects of his virtues; and the rejection of catharsis (as I have suggested in my essay "The Play of Conscience"⁴) may also spring from an apprehension of the genuine difficulties in the Aristotelian passage. But no alternative theory is proposed, and Scaliger's genres, despite their breadth, leave little room for a critic who wishes to understand the *effects* of drama.

And yet, on the whole, the most serious kind of drama was defined for most Renaissance critics precisely by its effect as described by Aristotle, or at least by Aristotle as the Renaissance understood him. It was generally assumed that drama was a form of rhetoric; imitation was its means, but its function was to persuade. (The principal sixteenth-century exceptions to this are found in Scaliger and Guarini, for whom imitation was not the means but the end of drama. This is a more strictly Aristotelian line, since for Aristotle poetry was a form of logic, not rhetoric.) Tragedy achieved its end by purging the passions of its audience through pity and terror—catharsis was the particular kind of utility produced by tragedy. Now the passage in Aristotle from which this notion derives is brief and notoriously puzzling; I have discussed its ramifications for Renaissance theories of drama in "The Play of Conscience", where the issue is considered in detail. I shall give here, therefore,

⁴ See below, 193-211.

only a short summary of the relevant points. Tragic catharsis is mentioned only once in the *Poetics*, in a passage that says, literally, that drama “effects through pity and terror purgation of similar feelings”—that pitiable and terrible events (strictly speaking, not the emotions of pity and terror but the things in the play that arouse these emotions) purge similar events and feelings. From the time of the first Renaissance commentators, it has been almost invariably assumed that the purgation takes place in the audience, that it is the spectators who are purged by means of their response to the terrible events of the drama. But it is not clear from the syntax that Aristotle is referring to the audience at this point at all, and Gerald Else, in the most persuasive statement of the argument against the standard reading, maintains that the effect Aristotle is describing takes place entirely within the play’s action. The pitiable and terrible events that precipitate the tragedy—the parricide of Oedipus, the matricide of Orestes—are purged by the pitiable and terrible sufferings of the hero. It is Thebes or Athens that is purified, not the audience (Else 1957, 224-32. 423-47).

The notion of tragedy as a genre defined by its effect is a Renaissance one. Modern accounts, on the other hand, are far more concerned with *hamartia*, the “tragic flaw,” and with the hero. Indeed, we even locate the flaw *in* the hero, whereas Aristotle says that it is to be found in the action. The clearest and most enthusiastic developments of the cathartic thesis in the Renaissance are Italian; they are characteristically broad and inclusive, and often cite the purifying properties of drama as evidence of the utility of theatre to the health of the state. English claims tend to be both scarcer and more modest, though Thomas Heywood’s *An Apology for Actors* invokes a quite sensational instance of the purgative topos in action, citing a story about a woman who had murdered her husband and, seeing a play about a similar crime, was driven to confess in a paroxysm of repentance. Aristotelian catharsis here literally takes place in the audience; and this must be the sort of example Hamlet has in mind when he projects the operation of his play *The Mousetrap* upon the conscience of the guilty king. Such stories were common enough in the period, and so powerful were the effects of tragedy on audiences generally claimed to be that many critics recommended that the emotional impact be mitigated,

lest the spectators be utterly overwhelmed. In fact, tragedies were regularly performed in Italy with comic or grotesque *intermezzi* between the acts. Doubtless this was primarily designed to satisfy a taste for variety; but there was also good critical doctrine to justify the practice.

Tragic catharsis, moreover, was quickly accommodated to comedy as well. Francesco Robortello, the first major commentator on the *Poetics* (1548), effortlessly derived an "Aristotelian" theory of comedy from his own translation of the essay, for the most part by simply substituting the word comedy for tragedy. And fifty years later Guarini declared that "comedy, through laughter, releases the soul from melancholy, renders its operation light and quick. Tragedy in a contrary way, calls the flighty soul back to seriousness and reason, making it fear to a proper degree those things which it should fear".⁵ Socrates at the end of the *Symposium* had been able to convince Agathon and Aristophanes, tragic and comic dramatists, that their two arts were the same. I know of no Renaissance theorist who cites the passage as a precedent, but it is clear that by Guarini's time, Socrates had made his case.

Returning now to the notion of drama as a dichotomy, a split between comedy and tragedy, we can see that comedy, in the accounts just cited, is not merely an alternative to tragedy, since their operations are fully complementary. Comedy is as necessary as tragedy to the psychological health of the state; more than this, comedy is necessary to tragedy for the proper effects of drama to be achieved in the audience. Our own notions of what is appropriate to tragedy tend to conceive of a drama that is much more unmixed, and when we think about Renaissance tragedies we usually forget about the *intermezzi*. When we consider the effects of *King Lear* or *Hamlet* or *Anthony and Cleopatra* on seventeenth-century audiences, we are quick to observe that Shakespeare's comic scenes do not relieve but rather heighten the tragic movement. But do we ever remind ourselves that tragedies on the English stage invariably concluded with jigs? The deaths of Cordelia and Lear, Hamlet, and Cleopatra were followed by dances, sometimes by comic songs, plays of wit, even clowning. This was not merely considered acceptable; it was

⁵ See the summary in Weinberg 1961, 658.

an invariable practice, catering no doubt to a popular taste for variety but also serving to mitigate the tragic catastrophe.

Sebastiano Serlio, designing the prototype stage settings for the three Aristotelian dramatic genres, summed up the Renaissance attitude toward the dramatic categories in a concise visual statement. The comic and tragic scenes are both cityscapes, two versions of the same society, two views of the same world. But the satiric scene is wooded and wild; it takes place somewhere altogether different. Palladio and Scamozzi institutionalised the dichotomy in the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza: the permanent setting, five perspective street scenes, can accommodate either comedy or tragedy. But the theatre has no way of presenting the third kind, the satiric or pastoral.

3.

The dramatic dichotomy in the Renaissance, then, expressed not a sense of limitation but a real and fruitful interrelationship between the genres. By the same token, mixed forms were felt to be good because, as Sidney put it, “if severed they be good, the conjunction cannot be hurtfull” (1595, F2v)⁶ There was a comedy of wonder and delight, fully appropriate to the decorum of tragedy. What this argues, I think, is not that the Renaissance took its tragedies less seriously than we do, but rather more so. We can see the descent of the *intermezzi* and jigs in Nahum Tate’s revision of *King Lear*, which Johnson himself condoned precisely because he found the play so overwhelming, or in Davenant’s *Macbeth*, which provided flying machines and a sinking cave and expanded the witches’ scenes into a full set of musical and ballet entries.

Samuel Pepys gives a curious testimony to the dramatic force of the latter production. He first went to see *Macbeth*, his diary records, on November 5, 1664 at Davenant’s Duke of York’s Theater

⁶ Sidney’s later objection to “their mungrell Tragy-comedie” derives not from the mixture of genres but from the failure to observe decorum, “mingling Kings and Clownes . . . Horn-pypes and Funeralls” (K2r). This is not to say that there were no critics who deplored the mixture of comedy with tragedy; but they were, in the main, those critics who scorned drama as a form precisely because it depended for its effect on an audience.

and thought it only “a pretty good play, but admirably acted.”⁷ Two years later, on December 28, 1666, he went again, this time with his wife, and was much more enthusiastic: “to the Duke’s House, and there saw *Macbeth* most excellently acted, and a most excellent play for variety” (7.423). Ten days later, on January 7, 1667, he was back, and this time he undertook to account for his growing interest in the production: “To the Duke’s house and saw *Macbeth*, which, though I saw it lately, yet appears a most excellent play in all respects, but especially in divertisement, though it be a deep tragedy; which is a strange perfection in a tragedy, it being most proper here and suitable” (8.7). Pepys knows what he is supposed to think about “divertisement” in tragedy; but the critical principle is contradicted by the aesthetic facts, and he accedes to the facts. On April 19 he returned once more “to the playhouse, where saw *Macbeth*, which, though I have seen it often, yet is it one of the best plays for a stage, and a variety of dancing and music, that ever I saw.” On this occasion, however, his wife tells him that the servants “do observe my minding my pleasures more than usual, which I confess, and am ashamed,” and he determines to “leave it till Whitsunday” (8.171)—no small self-denial, for in that year Whitsunday fell on May 26, more than a month away. He saw the play again on October 16, but this time he “was vexed to see Young, who is but a bad actor at best, act *Macbeth* in the room of Betterton, who, poor man! is sick, but Lord! what a prejudice it wrought in me against the whole play” (8.482). Nevertheless, three weeks later, on November 6, he was back with his wife at “*Macbeth*, which we still like mightily, though mighty short of the content we used to have when Betterton acted, who is still sick” (8.521). On the next August 12 he and his wife again “saw *Macbeth*, to our great content” (9.278); and they went yet again on December 21, 1668. This time, however, the performance had to compete for Pepys’s attention with both a bearded lady in the afternoon (“bushy and thick . . . a strange sight to me, I confess, and what pleased me mightily”) and the presence in the theatre of the king and court (9.398). Three weeks later, on January 15, 1669, he was engaged with the lords of the Treasury, but he sent his wife and a friend to see the play once more by themselves (9.416).

⁷ Pepys 1974, 5:314; all further citations appear in the text.

Pepys here is a true heir of the Renaissance spectator, endlessly enthusiastic about tragedy and finding that the inclusion of “divertisement” only adds to its effectiveness. In fact, as I have indicated in my essay “Macbeth and the Antic Round” (2002, 159-72), what is probably most notable about Davenant’s version of *Macbeth* is not its inclusion of *intermezzi*, which had, in one form or another, been a feature of popular tragedy both on the Continent and in England for over a century, but the decision to incorporate them directly into the structure of the play and thus to make *Macbeth* itself a dramatic dichotomy.

In the examples I have been discussing, comedy had its place as an adjunct to tragedy, necessary but nevertheless dependent. There is a generic truth in this: the tragic purgation of the state and the spirit and the reassertion of norms that is the end of tragedy leave us in the world of comedy. Tragedy is what makes comedy possible—or, putting it another way, comedy is the end of tragedy—and the Renaissance liked to emphasise this aspect of tragedy by concluding its tragedies with jigs. But of course comedy is also an independent genre, and its nature has always proved far more elusive to critics than that of tragedy. Aristotle could not learn its history; and though Robortello and Guarini undertook to infer theories of comedy from the theory of tragedy, their accounts fail to persuade precisely because they fail to distinguish sufficiently the two genres from each other. Comedy cannot simply be tragedy with the name changed. We may be unclear about tragic catharsis, but at least we know it is there, convincing us that tragedy *works*—even if we do not know how or on whom. We have had, historically, no such conviction about comedy, not even a general agreement about what constitutes its “working”. Discussions of comedy have traditionally tended to be concerned primarily with its subject matter, its structure, or personnel.

Comedy has usually been described as inhering in the general, tragedy in the particular: comedy is a world of types and eccentrics, tragedy of individuals and unique occurrences. There has never been a *tragedia dell’arte*, but the *commedia dell’arte*, a set of stock characters with a variable scenario, has provided a norm for comedy since Greek and Roman times. This is, of course, only a norm, and will not account for all examples, nor is it by any means the only

comic norm. Still, even considering the broadest range of comedy, we tend to find the really individualised comic characters not in plays but in novels, in figures like Don Quixote and Mr Micawber. If we turn to drama for counter-examples, the most obvious is Falstaff, and he is certainly a comic character—no one more so. Is it entirely a quibble to remark that he was created not for a comedy but for a history, and one which, moreover, the contemporary observer Francis Meres classified as a tragedy? When Falstaff subsequently became the centre of his own comedy, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he was far less individualised, much more of a type. There are, in any case, very few Falstaffs in comedy. The greatest comic characters of drama have tended to be either stock characters (Harlequin and Scaramouche) or actors – W.C. Fields, Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, Zero Mostel (or Will Kempe, or Robert Armin)—who always played essentially the same role. The most highly individualised comic characters in Shakespeare are figures like Rosalind, Berowne, Beatrice, Benedick who are unique by virtue of being critics. But even these characters, even when they are as central as Rosalind is to the action of her drama, we do not treat in the way we treat tragic protagonists; criticism does not feel a need to investigate and explain their psychologies as it does with Hamlet, Lear, and Coriolanus; we do not think of them as individuals, that is to say, as existing outside of their dramatic contexts, apart from their plays. And individualised as are Jonson's or Moliere's great comic creations—say Sir Epicure Mammon or Alceste the Misanthrope—they are individual by virtue of being eccentric: their eccentricity posits a norm; and if they cannot ultimately be accommodated to that norm, they will ultimately be expelled by it. When Coriolanus is banished, his play moves with him: there is, dramatically speaking, a world elsewhere. But Alceste stalks offstage, we hear no more of Malvolio or Don John, and all that is left of Shylock in the final act of his play is an admonitory precept about the man who hath no music in himself. I am not, of course, denying that tragedy also uses eccentrics and stock characters—the orphaned child, the widowed mother, the moustache-twirling villain, the lecherous landlord, the heartless plutocrat. Comedy, however, normally works in this way; and the less tragedy does so, the more seriously we are willing to take it.

The generalising and normative nature of comedy may be seen too in an important linguistic phenomenon. In most European languages in the Renaissance the generic term for drama was comedy. The Swiss traveler Thomas Platter in 1599 reported that when he was in London he “saw the tragedy of the first Emperor Julius [Caesar] with at least fifteen characters very well acted. At the end of the comedy,” he continues, “they danced according to their custom . . .” (qtd in Chambers 1923, 2.365). Comedy, for Platter, *includes* tragedy. Platter’s word for actor is “comedian”; *comedien* is still a generic term for actor in French, as is *commediante* in Italian. Although the OED does not note this usage in English, Johnson’s dictionary gives as a definition of comedian “a player in general, a stage-player.”

If we think about comedy in terms of stock characters, Shakespeare provides some interesting examples. Here, for instance, are two hypothetical casts: (1) A jealous husband, a chaste wife, an irascible father, a clever malicious servant, a gullible friend, a bawdy witty maid; (2) A pair of lovers, their irascible fathers, a bawdy serving woman, a witty friend, a malicious friend, a kindly foolish priest. Both of these groups represent recognisable comic configurations, though in fact they are also the casts of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Being able to see them in this light, I think, reveals something important about how both these tragedies work. Much of their dramatic force derives from the way they continually tempt us with comic possibilities. We are told in a prologue that Romeo and Juliet are star-crossed, but if inevitability is a requisite of tragedy, neither play will qualify for the genre: they are the most iffy dramas in the Shakespeare canon. At innumerable points in both plays, had anything happened differently, the tragic catastrophe would have been averted. *Othello* particularly teases audiences in this way—as the famous story about the man who leapt from his seat, furious at the impending murder of Desdemona, and shouted “You fool, can’t you see she’s innocent?” reveals. The story is no doubt apocryphal (I have even heard it told about Verdi’s opera), but the point is that it is unique to this play: there are no similar tales of spectators leaping up to rescue Cordelia, to save Gloucester from blinding, to dash the asp from Cleopatra’s hand. Thomas Rymer’s analysis of *Othello* is perverse and insensitive; but his rage at the play constitutes an absolutely authentic response.

Conversely, I think that *Measure for Measure* tempts us with tragic possibilities. For the Jacobean spectator (or editor), the play's conclusion was sufficient to define it as a comedy. Modern critics, however, want a term that accounts for the whole of the play's tone and action; hence we call it a dark comedy, or a problem play, as if it could not start out one way and end another. What would a Renaissance audience have expected of a drama called *Measure for Measure*? The title says we get what we deserve: it is surely not the title of a comedy. Comedy gives us *more* than we deserve; treat every man according to his deserts, and the results are very serious indeed. All the expectations that are raised in the first three acts are consistent with the title and promise a tragic conclusion. The play then changes its course not by suddenly imposing a happy ending but by adopting in the final two acts a radically new tone toward its central questions of morality and license, law and justice, chastity and lust. Indeed, its transformed attitude toward sexuality is even realised in that classic device of low comedy, the bed trick. Obviously this sort of thing will be successful only with an audience willing to follow changes of tone and not expecting consistency from its genres. But if one takes tragedy seriously, one will also take seriously being rescued from it.

Shakespeare could make such a play effective and the spectators could respond to it because they believed in the living reality of the dramatic genres. The categories were not only what related the culture to its past but also what related the playwright and his audience to one another. Like Scaliger, Shakespeare thought of genres not as sets of rules but as sets of expectations and possibilities. Comedy and tragedy were not forms: they were shared assumptions.

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PART 2
Elizabethan Practice

Seeing Through Costume

Disguise is by definition superficial, the misrepresentation of one's appearance, though etymologically it imagines something much more radical, a "dis-appearance," which can imply anything from a mere move out of sight to the total annihilation of the person whose appearance is undone. It also assumes that there is always an essence beneath the appearance, something being concealed, misrepresented, or denied. Corollary to this is that the essence is different from the disguise, and that what is concealed is what is real – this is not quite as axiomatic as it appears: consider such a construction, from *Henry V*, as "Then should the warlike Harry like himself / Assume the port of Mars . . ." (Prologue 5-6), where the self is entirely congruent with the persona. Clearly, however, being like oneself is different from being oneself—the self is a role one plays. The congruence is, in any case, acknowledged to be all but impossible, requiring a "muse of fire." When the change of appearance includes a fictional or theatrical element and is not intended to render the person unrecognisable – intended not to conceal the real but to adorn it, even to make the person more strikingly recognisable – we call the disguise a costume, a relatively new term, existing in English only since the mid-eighteenth century, deriving from French and Italian words for "custom," and involving notions of the fashionable. This too assumes that though the externals may change, there is a self within that does not. Disguise is the essence of theatre, and thereby of drama in performance, and it is enabled by, though not subsumed in, costume – what we are meant to see beneath the costumes on stage is the characters, not the actors. But costume, as a defining feature of almost any social role, is also essential to the functioning of every human culture.

I begin, however, with a few examples to remind us that the permanence and impenetrability of the self beneath the costume, and therefore the essential superficiality of the costume, has not always been taken for granted. The history of anti-theatricalism from Plato onward assumes that actors are indeed changed by their costumes; and Renaissance polemicists in England were especially exercised by the transvestism of the Elizabethan stage, arguing from both platonic and patristic examples that the wearing of female garments necessarily resulted in an effeminisation of the actor's masculine self, and from that to the corruption of the audience. The self, in such arguments, is the most fragile of entities, acutely permeable by externals. In the context of Shakespeare's England, this claim was eccentric, even pathologically so, a defining feature of a lunatic fringe, and the urban mercantile audience to whom it was directed was largely unpersuaded, since it also constituted the principal audience for the popular theatre of the age. But its assumptions nevertheless resonated in significant ways throughout the culture. Indeed, they have continued to do so: Robert Merrill, a leading baritone at the Metropolitan Opera for thirty years, was an orthodox Jew, and when he sang in *Don Carlo* or *La Forza del Destino* he always refused to wear a cross, lest this attribute of the role somehow penetrate and violate his inner self. The stage property, for this performer, had a dangerous interiority; which argues a striking belief in the power of the Christian symbol coming from an orthodox Jew. In contrast, for Enrico Caruso, singing Eléazar in *La Juive*, the Jewish ritual garments were an essential element of the role, and he made much of them. Was Caruso's self less fragile than Merrill's, or did he simply take the role less seriously – or was Merrill, like Shakespeare's imagined Henry V, always playing himself?

As these examples suggest, it is not always clear what distinguishes the external from the internal. In the case of a light-skinned African American who passes as white, for example, what is the relation between the skin colour and the true self? The disguise, if there is one, is entirely internal – such people have undergone no visible change, but present themselves, or think of themselves, in a new way. New ways of self-presentation are the very essence of fashion, which constantly reinvents itself, often blatantly, commanding attention through attempts to shock. What exactly is

shocking in unconventional hair styles, revealing clothing, tattoos, body piercings? What fears are parents expressing in their alarm at the unexpected ways their children present themselves? The fear must be that the rebelliousness is not merely external; that the costume does express an inner reality, that our children are no longer versions of ourselves; but somewhere in the course of that reasoning must also be a conviction that the costume is the problem, that without the external transformation the inner rebellion would cease to exist, as Hamlet's mother urges him to cast his "nighted colour" off, as if that would restore him to sociability. Culturally, the change, in fact, tends to work in the opposite direction: the transformations of fashion quickly cease to be shocking and become simply stylish – in the past couple of decades when black has been fashionable, most of the court in productions of *Hamlet* has been costumed like Hamlet, and even the parents of my students now occasionally sport tattoos and nose studs.

How deep can disguise go? What is the effect of costume on the self? Here is an instance in which the effect is as essential as it can be in a narrative – in which, that is, the effect is linguistic, and specifically, grammatical. Barnabe Riche, in his *Farewell to the Military Profession* (1594), tells the story of Apolonius and Silla. Silla and Silvio are twins, children of the Duke of Cyprus. Silvio is off at the wars; Silla falls in love with Apolonius, the duke of Constantinople, who is visiting at her father's court. When Apolonius departs, Silla determines to follow him, and persuades a faithful servant to accompany her on a ship about to sail for Constantinople. She disguises herself in very simple attire, but the captain, struck by her exceptional beauty, proposes either to make love to her or, if she refuses, to rape her. Silla contemplates suicide, but a violent storm arises, the ship is wrecked, and Silla, clinging to a chest full of the captain's clothes, is washed ashore. Realising the dangers faced by a young woman traveling alone, she disguises herself this time as a young man, wearing the sea-captain's clothes. She takes the name of her twin brother, Silvio, makes her way to Constantinople, seeks out the Duke Apolonius, and enters his service (Riche 1594, G2r-I3v).

As most readers will be aware, this is the plot of *Twelfth Night*, though it is, for all its conventional romance elements, a far more rational version of the story than Shakespeare's. This heroine has

already known and fallen in love with the duke who was to become Orsino, and she has a cogent reason for her cross-dressing, to avoid a repetition of the fate she has so narrowly escaped – Shakespeare cleans up the story, and in so doing removes the motive for the disguise.

Rational or not, however, the disguise turns out to be far more problematic for Silla than for Viola. After some months, when we are well into the plot, Silvio appears in Constantinople: he has been traveling the Mediterranean searching for his sister. Julina, Shakespeare's Olivia, encounters him, and naturally thinks he is his twin. She takes him home and entertains him; she is delighted with him – for once he is not undertaking to woo her on his master's behalf, and indeed, Apolonius's name is not mentioned at all. And Silvio, overcoming his astonishment at the attention he is getting from a total stranger, is enchanted with her beauty and charm. One thing leads to another, and they spend the night together. The next morning, Silvio leaves, to continue his search for Silla. Two months later Julina realises that she is pregnant.

She confronts Apolonius, demanding justice: his servant has taken advantage of her. Silla is summoned, and naturally denies everything; but it is clear to Apolonius that Julina is telling the truth, and he insists that his servant now marry Julina. Silla refuses, offering no reason for the refusal, and Apolonius imprisons "him". Julina visits the prisoner, berating and pleading; her oaths and absolute conviction are so persuasive that Silla herself "was like to beleeve that it had bin true in very deede; but remembryng his owne impediment, thought it impossible that he should committe such an acte" (Riche 1594, I1v) – notice both that Silla's disguise here is grammatical (the narration continues to refer to her with a masculine pronoun) and that she herself has to stop to remind herself that she is not what she appears – and even in doing so, contemplating the one thing that guarantees her innocence, she remains male, "remembryng his owne impediment". Even the eventual, ultimate revelation to Julina, Silla's confession of the genital truth about herself, does not undo the disguise: "And here with all loosing his garmentes doune to his stomacke, and shewed Julina his breastes and pretie teates . . . sayng: . . . See, I am a woman . . .". Silla only finally becomes grammatically female when

Apolonius, “amased to hear this strange discourse of Silvio, came unto him . . . perceived indeede that it was Silla . . . and embracing her” (I3r) – at last a feminine pronoun – orders a definitively feminine wardrobe for her and proposes marriage. The true nature of the character here, even syntactically, is determined by the name and the provision of an appropriate costume.

In *Twelfth Night*, Viola and Sebastian are indistinguishable merely because they are identically dressed, and Viola is never in any doubt about the gender of the self beneath the costume. Nevertheless, the costume is still of the essence: at the very end of the play, when all the revelations have been made, Orsino still declares that the concluding marriage cannot take place until Viola’s original clothes have been recovered; these have been hidden by the sea captain, who, in a plot twist introduced out of nowhere at the last minute, has been arrested on some unknown charge of Malvolio’s, and will not reveal the whereabouts of the clothes until he is released, which only Malvolio can effect—and Malvolio has stormed out of the play, declaring that he will “be revenged on the whole pack of you” (5.1.371). It is not, moreover, merely female garb that is required for this happy ending; it must be the original costume in which we first saw Viola – no one suggests that she borrow a dress from Olivia, or buy a wedding gown. The costume, the play insists, is Viola, and therefore it must be the right costume.

Disguises in Shakespeare are almost always absolute—with a small number of exceptions, nobody ever sees through a disguise (the exceptions are Falstaff in drag in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Tamora’s impersonation of the allegorical figure of Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*, Tybalt recognising Romeo behind his mask at the Capulets’ ball, and the most significant one, the Muscovite masquerade in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, which the ladies penetrate with ease, though their own disguises are impenetrable to the men – Shakespeare’s testimony, perhaps, to the superior perspicacity of French women). But for the most part in Shakespeare’s drama, people are as they present themselves. We treat this as a theatrical trope, a point where we are simply required to suspend our disbelief – my students often ask me whether Orlando in his scenes with the disguised Rosalind in *As You Like It* really thinks he is talking to

a boy. My reply, that on Shakespeare's stage he really was talking to a boy, only reveals to them how unimaginable the conditions of the Elizabethan stage are, and how far Shakespeare is from being credible. But there are some striking cases in the world outside the theatre that suggest that the device has more to do with cultural assumptions than with theatrical convention. I have discussed two of these in my book *Impersonations*, and I return to one of them now for a closer look.

The cases concern Lady Arbella Stuart and Elizabeth Southwell. Both these aristocratic women escaped the bondage of patriarchy and arranged their own marriages through successful transvestite disguises – disguises as impenetrable, and impenetrable in the same way, as those of Rosalind, Jessica, Portia, Viola, Imogen. I am focusing here on Arbella Stuart, whose case has ramifications that I did not discuss in *Impersonations*.

Arbella Stuart was the granddaughter of the famous and formidable Bess of Hardwick, Countess of Shrewsbury, so loyal a supporter of Queen Elizabeth that for twenty years she and her husband were entrusted with the custody of Mary Queen of Scots. In 1574, however, Bess married her daughter, in haste and in secrecy, to the Scottish queen's brother-in-law, the young Charles Stuart, Duke of Lennox, brother of Mary's murdered husband the Earl of Darnley and therefore uncle to James VI of Scotland, who even at this period was being spoken of as the presumptive successor to the English throne. Lennox himself had the same claim to the English throne as his brother Darnley had had, through their grandmother Frances Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk, the niece of Henry VIII – it was chiefly this claim that had recommended the disastrous Darnley as a husband for Mary, who had always had her eye on the throne of England. Any marriage with Lennox, therefore, affected the line of succession to the English throne, and could not be performed without the crown's permission. Nevertheless the match was solemnised at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, Bess's estate – a long, hard ride from London; it took several weeks for the news to reach the capital. Elizabeth was enraged, and imprisoned the bridegroom's mother, but her trust in the Shrewsburys was such that, beyond a stern rebuke, they suffered no consequences. The young couple were left alone, and the marriage was allowed to survive.

Lennox died after only two years, and the sole child of that marriage was the Lady Arbella Stuart, who was therefore a first cousin to King James and a distant cousin to Queen Elizabeth. Much of her life was taken up with attempts to find a suitable husband, one who would be acceptable to the English crown. Needless to say no such person could be produced: neither Elizabeth nor James had any interest in increasing the pool of candidates for their throne.

So Arbella finally took matters into her own hands. In 1610, at the age of 35, she secretly married William Seymour, a grandson of the Earl of Hertford with a distant claim to the throne – in 1603 she had proposed marriage to his brother Edward, a boy of 16 whom she had never seen, but she had received only a curt and frightened dismissal from his father. This time no parental permission was solicited, but the match was still illegal, requiring the king's permission, and when it became known, Seymour was imprisoned in the Tower and Arbella placed under house arrest, initially at Lambeth. When it was found that this made it too easy for her to communicate with her husband, she was ordered to be sent north to Durham. As the journey began, she took ill, and the party stopped at Barnet, in north London, for some weeks. As the move once again seemed imminent, Arbella took action. She persuaded one of her attendants that she was stealing out to pay a final visit to Seymour, and would return before morning. She disguised herself as a man, with trousers and boots, a doublet and a black cloak. She wore a man's wig that partially concealed her features, and a black hat, and she carried a rapier. In this disguise she fled, successfully deceiving an innkeeper and an ostler as to her sex, and headed for the coast for a rendezvous with Seymour, where they intended to take a boat to freedom in France.

Seymour escaped the Tower through an equally ingenious disguise plot. Seymour's barber, who regularly attended on him, appeared at the Tower thoroughly disguised, and asked for himself (that is, asked for Seymour's barber), saying that he was with Seymour. He was admitted, together they disguised Seymour in the barber's usual clothes, and both then went out together. The guards asked no questions, since the disguised barber was the man who had just gone in; nor did they say anything to the man they took to be the barber, because he was accustomed to go in and out almost daily.

For Arbella this comedy did not have a happy ending: the couple missed their rendezvous, and though both took ships separately for Calais, Arbella's was pursued; she was arrested at sea, and spent the rest of her life – only five years – imprisoned in the Tower. Seymour, however, disembarked safely in France and lived abroad until Arbella's death. He then returned to England, and within the year married the daughter of the Earl of Essex.

The disguises of Shakespearean drama look less conventional if we consider them with these cases in mind. It is scarcely hyperbole to say that disguise offered Arbella Stuart the only hope of an escape from the intolerable situation her paternity had placed her in – Imogen's case in *Cymbeline* is hardly more melodramatic. And both Seymour's and Arbella's disguises were genuinely impenetrable, quite as impenetrable as any in Shakespeare. Arbella had a long, hard ride from Barnet to the coast, during which she and her servant stopped at an inn and changed horses—the ostler later reported only that the young man seemed unwell, and had difficulty with the horse (Arbella would have been accustomed to riding side-saddle), but he had no inkling that there was a woman beneath the clothing and hair. And though both Seymour and his barber were well known to the guards of the Tower, it was nevertheless perfectly possible to disguise Seymour as his barber and his barber as somebody unknown, both impenetrably. These cases are a good index to how much the sense of who one was in the period depended precisely on externals, on costume, wigs, facial hair, attributes such as jewelry and accessories—on everything that comprised the representation of a social role. But beyond this, there must be a presumption in the culture that such superficialities represent realities, and are the closest we can come to knowing somebody.

But now let us consider two counter-examples, the first from two centuries later. In the last act of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, in which Suzanne and the Countess are disguised as each other, Figaro, at a moment of high drama, suddenly penetrates Suzanne's disguise. In Beaumarchais, it is Suzanne who accidentally lets her identity slip out; but in Da Ponte's libretto for Mozart, Figaro recognises his wife's voice – “io conobbi la voce che adoro” (I knew the voice that I adore). The two women have been imitating each other, but there are limits to mimesis.

The limits, however, to both mimesis and recognition, are only those of Enlightenment aesthetics: consider a Renaissance analogue. *Don Quixote* is full of people in disguise, and the eventual revelation of the truth beneath the disguise constitutes one of the main narrative principles of the work. The revelation, however, is hardly ever a matter of the disguise being penetrable, save of course in the case of Don Quixote himself, whose chivalric persona is constantly coming undone – the hero is a credible knight only to himself. Near the end of part 1, however, in the course of the extended episode of Cardenio, comes the story of Doña Clara and the mule boy. Doña Clara is traveling with her father, a judge; they are staying at an inn with a number of other guests, including Cardenio, Dorothea, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Dorothea and Doña Clara are sleeping together, and in the middle of the night Dorothea is awakened by a song. Cardenio enters to tell them that it is a mule boy singing, with the most beautiful voice he has ever heard. Dorothea wakes Clara to hear the mule boy, and Clara immediately identifies the voice as that of Don Luis, a noble youth who is in love with her – like Figaro, she has no difficulty recognising the voice that she adores. He has indeed disguised himself as a mule driver, but the disguise is basically irrelevant. Here is the story.

Don Luis lived in a house opposite Clara's, and though her father kept the windows of his house carefully curtained, the youth saw Clara, perhaps at church, and fell in love with her. He never spoke with her, but made her understand by gestures from his window that he wanted to marry her. She loved him too, but she was well aware that his aristocratic family would never agree to such a match for their son, and she never told her father about it. When her father determined on the journey they are now taking, she could not even see Don Luis to wave farewell. But after they had been on the road for two days, she says:

I saw him . . . dressed as a mule-lad; and so much like one that if I had not borne his portrait in my heart, I should have found it impossible to recognize him. I knew him; I was amazed; I was delighted . . . I have never spoken a word to him in my life, but . . . I love him so much that I cannot live without him" (Cervantes 1990, 389-90).

The disguise, therefore, is impeccable, but she sees through it because of the portrait in her heart – it is that that she recognises, the projection of her innermost self. And, adoring him as she does, she also immediately identifies his singing, although she has never heard his voice: they have never exchanged a word. This is magically romantic, a testimony to the mystical power of true love.

It all seems much more routine the next morning, however, when Don Luis's father's servants appear at the inn to apprehend him and bring him home. They have found him easily, and have no difficulty penetrating his disguise. They berate him for his socially degrading costume, and at this point, even Doña Clara's father recognises him. In fact, the concept of disguise itself undergoes a significant transformation in the course of this story. Initially it appears as the essence of romance, epitomising the love that pierces to the heart, the truth of the self that can be known only by the beloved. But as the plot unfolds and the young man's scheme unravels, the disguise appears more and more a mere gesture toward the conventions of romance. It has scarcely concealed the youth at all; everyone who knows him recognises him, not only Doña Clara. The disguise has at most briefly enabled him to travel without attracting attention. Even the motive for the concealment turns out to have been greatly exaggerated: in the morning, hard pressed to explain himself, the young man finally confesses his love to Doña Clara's father, who, mastering his astonishment, is delighted with so fine a match for his daughter; and the story becomes positively banal as the episode ends with the whole group of travelers discussing ways of persuading the young man's father to approve the marriage. Presumably they will succeed: the romance dissipates with the disguise, and we never hear the end of this story. Without the disguise, the episode is of no further interest.

So disguise here is a metonym for romance, both the romance of love and the romance of storytelling, a metonym for the novel itself. It seems axiomatic that the point of any disguise plot is the penetration of the disguise, the revelation that constitutes the plot's resolution; but in this case the revelation simply aborts the story. In the same way, when the old gentleman from La Mancha with the uncertain surname, Quexada or Quesada, stops impersonating the

chivalric knight Don Quixote, which is the only identity he has for us, the immense novel is finally over.

One can imagine a romance in which the plot does not ultimately undo itself in this way; where disguise becomes the reality, the true expression of the self—where the impersonation becomes the person. This actually happens in Beaumont and Fletcher’s play *Philaster* (1609), in which the embattled heroine Euphrasia, disguised as the page Bellario, decides to remain permanently in drag and serve her lord and lady as an epicene youth, equally attractive to men and women. There are gestures toward this sort of essentialisation of costume in Shakespeare. In *As You Like It*, when Rosalind disguises herself as the youth Ganymede to accompany Celia in their flight into the forest of Arden, it is for the same practical reasons offered by Barnabe Riche’s *Silla*: women on the road are always in danger, and the presence of a man – any kind of man, even a prepubescent youth – is considered a sufficient deterrent to predators. The disguise subsequently becomes a cover for her meetings with Orlando; but why is the cover necessary? It would appear, indeed, to be self-defeating: by the middle of the play, when Orlando is tacking love-poems to Rosalind on every tree, Rosalind is perfectly well aware of his feelings for her. She even acknowledges the pointlessness of continuing her disguise: “Alas the day, what shall I do with my doublet and hose?” (3.2.214-15). Why not at this point reveal herself, and consummate the love? But the play is scarcely half over; for another two acts, always as Ganymede, she puts Orlando through a series of tests and catechisms, good for comedy but only serving to delay the ultimate erotic satisfaction. Disguise here, as in the episode of Doña Clara from *Don Quixote*, is the essence of romance, and when the disguise is discarded the romance has ended – in this case in marriage, though if we think about what happens after marriage in Shakespeare, for example in *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, it is not clear that abandoning the disguise necessarily constitutes a happy ending.

In *Twelfth Night* Viola is initially quite explicit about the relevance of her disguise to her inner state. It will be, she says, “the form of my intent” (1.2.55). By the middle of the play she has changed her mind, calling disguise “a wickedness / In which the pregnant enemy [Satan] does much” (2.3.27-8): she is now trapped

in a costume that misrepresents the form of her intent, that makes it impossible for her to express her feelings. But she too maintains the disguise long after its utility in the plot has been exhausted. In the middle of act 3, when Antonio intervenes in her duel with Sir Andrew and calls her Sebastian, it is clear to her that her brother is alive and in Illyria – she concludes the scene with the recognition “That I, dear brother, now be ta’en for you” (3.4.361). The resolution, the unmasking, could occur at any point after this; but she retains her disguise for another two acts, even in the final confrontation with her twin, putting him through a pointless exercise comparing details about their parentage. The eventual unmasking, moreover, does nothing to change the terms on which the play has operated throughout: appearances remain of the essence. Olivia has fallen in love with the cross-dressed Viola, and when Sebastian appears, identically costumed, she instantly, effortlessly, transfers her feelings to him – the twins are, for Olivia, interchangeable. But if falling in love with a cross-dressed woman is the same as falling in love with a man, what is a man except the costume?

There are very few plays that are willing to acknowledge that gender is in fact more than the costume—that that part of the self that is defined by gender is ultimately and absolutely real and knowable. Viola, challenged by Sir Andrew, laments that “a little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man” (3.4.282-3), invoking in that lack a very old anatomical fantasy that women are men with something missing (the fantasy is as old as Galen, but it is still present in Freud). The play alludes to this assumption elsewhere, in its puns on “cut” and “cunt”. This is obviously a male fantasy, not a female one, though in this case Viola’s failure of nerve is not merely a function of the missing genital organs: in the duel, Sir Andrew turns out to be no more of a “man” than Viola. In a much more substantial example, the strange play *The Honest Man’s Fortune* by John Fletcher probably in collaboration with Nathan Field and Philip Massinger (1613), a very attractive young man named Veramour is propositioned by an elderly lecher. To repel his attentions Veramour claims he is really a woman, and proceeds to dress accordingly. This stratagem is not successful, since the lecher is equally attracted to women, and as the play nears its climax, a good deal of discussion takes place over the difficulties

of distinguishing attractive boys from women. The argument is short-circuited when one of the participants tartly observes that a hand thrust into the subject's underpants would easily settle the matter – a piece of common sense that would demolish a good many disguise plots.

Even in the real world, however, common sense is not always the bottom line, and the boundaries of mimesis are far more extensive than they are in the theatre. The witnesses who were deceived by Arbella Stuart saw nothing more intimate than her hair and her clothing, but they also detected nothing in her manner to suggest that any surprises might lie hidden beneath the clothing: gender here was a matter of behaviour and costume. There are a number of famous cases of people who successfully lived cross-gendered for years, for example the Chevalier d'Eon as a woman, and the jazz pianist Billy Tipton as a man. Tipton's sex was discovered only after his death, by the medical examiner; his wife and children (the children were adopted) had been entirely unaware of it. This means, obviously, that the marriage was without the usual sorts of intimacy, but his wife explained that this suited both of them, and the marriage was long and happy. This all sounds quite inconceivable, but Diane Middlebrook's superb biography of Tipton renders the story both credible and touchingly human. Initially Tipton passed as a man because in the 1930s for a woman to perform in jazz clubs as anything but a vocalist was simply impossible – the elderly band members from her early years, whom Middlebrook tracked down and interviewed, said they of course knew she was a woman; her cross-dressing was what made the band viable. Gradually the impersonation became the person. Tipton's wife, a stripper, said she was initially attracted to him precisely because he was unlike the other men she had known, gentle and affectionate, and not eager for sex – an unusual kind of man, in her experience, but not an inconceivable one, and since she had been badly mistreated by sexually aggressive men in the past, she was grateful for his manner and found him easy to fall in love with. He explained his physical aloofness by saying he had been seriously injured in an accident, and was obliged to wear heavy elastic bandages around his chest all the time; obviously they never saw each other naked. Out of this fiction Tipton

constructed an entirely satisfactory life with a wife, and later with children, for whom the fiction was fact.

It would be incorrect here to say that all Tipton's family knew of him was his costume. The costume represented an inner truth. That truth was constructed, certainly, but all our selves are surely constructed. The Billy Tipton story is no more incredible than the innumerable stories of people with aristocratic pretensions who turn out to have come from humble origins—the facts of gender seem to us much more basic and undeniable than the facts of social class, but surely this is an illusion. Billy Tipton's or Arbella Stuart's sexual anatomy would have been the ultimate reality only for the purposes of one particular type of sexual intercourse; for all other forms of social interaction, most of what constitutes life, gender is not a matter of anatomy but of self-presentation. There is, moreover, some degree of deception in every form of self-presentation—appearing naked is rarely an option in human society, and decisions about what to wear are decisions about the power of costume to make us look better than we look to ourselves, better than we know we are. “All the world's a stage” indeed, as Shakespeare's Jaques says, “And all the men and women merely players” (*As You Like It*, 2.7.138-9), though one could pause at length over that “merely,” as if the theatricality of everyday life were simple or superficial, rather than essential. On Jaques's stage, the actors are everything: his theatre has players but no playwright.

Over the centuries, the stage has gone to great lengths to insist on its coincidence with reality, initially through illusionistic scenery, and, from the eighteenth century, increasingly, through the invocation of history, specifically realised in historically informed costumes. In fact, it is probably not overstating the case to say that whatever historical relevance theatre has claimed has been expressed through costume. The move into history, however, was neither direct nor consistent. The famous Peacham drawing for *Titus Andronicus*¹ gestures toward ancient Rome in the costume of Titus, in the centre; but queen Tamora's costume is quite generalised, vaguely medieval, certainly neither Roman nor Elizabethan. Her

¹ Reproduced at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peacham_drawing (Last Access 2 January 2024).

sons and Aaron the Moor, on the right, are in outfits that combine Elizabethan and Roman elements, and the guards on the left are Elizabethan soldiers. The costumes here identify the characters according to their roles and their relation to each other, not to their place in a historical era—there is no attempt here to make the stage a mirror of the Roman world. Within two decades of this drawing, however, Inigo Jones was consulting the best available authorities on ancient Roman dress for his costumes for masques at the court of Charles I. If the king was to be idealised as a classical hero, the classical context had to be authentic.

On the dramatic stage, however, for the next two centuries, costume was either contemporary, or retained the syncretic character of the Peacham sketch. In Figure 1, the frontispiece to *Henry VIII* in the first illustrated Shakespeare, Nicholas Rowe's edition of 1709, Henry wears an early sixteenth-century costume based on the famous Holbein portrait, but his courtiers wear eighteenth-century formal dress, with frock coats and wigs.

The first attempt at a systematic change of the sort Inigo Jones had introduced into the masque did not come until 1731, when Aaron Hill's *The Generous Traitor, or Aethelwold*, set in Anglo-Saxon times, was staged in Old English costume – this was the author's idea, not the producer's. A *Macbeth* in historical Scottish costume was performed in Edinburgh in 1753, but the first Shakespearean production in historic dress came to the London stage only in 1773, in Charles Macklin's *Macbeth* (Figure 2), in which Macklin, for his first entrance, wore a plaid scarf, tartan stockings and a knee-length tunic (the tartans were anachronistic for eleventh-century Scotland, but less so than a kilt would have been). This was not a success, partly because Macklin was too closely identified with his famous Shylock – the caricature reproduced here is entitled *Shylock Turn'd Macbeth* – but even more because the costuming was totally inconsistent: by the middle of act 2 Macbeth was wearing eighteenth-century breeches (Figure 3), and his Lady Macbeth, Mrs Hartley, refused to wear Scottish garments at all, and was modishly dressed in a hoop skirt, in the fashion of Mrs Yates's Lady Macbeth a decade earlier, depicted in Figure 4. Visual artists of the period imagined up to date Scottish Macbeths. Figure 5 is Francesco Zuccarelli's *Macbeth, Banquo and the Witches*, painted in London

in the 1760s—this is the first Italian illustration of Shakespeare. Zuccarelli was famous for his landscapes in the tradition of Claude Lorrain, with, as here, a little Salvatore Rosa as well. These usually included mythological subjects, but, in a striking innovation, the mythology here is Shakespeare. But what a Shakespeare! The Scots tartans are striped, rather than checked, and Zuccarelli had clearly never seen kilts, which should just cover the knee; and the witches are graceful country girls, not at all “So withered and so wild in their attire / That look not like the inhabitants o’ th’ earth . . .” (1.3.40-1): this is Shakespeare imaginatively adapted to the requirements of romantic landscape painting. But Zuccarelli’s Shakespeare is also adapted to contemporary politics: Macbeth and his troops wear blue caps. This was the uniform worn by the Jacobite rebels at the battle of Culloden in 1746, when the Jacobite forces were decisively defeated. The costumes give a clear sense of what side Macbeth is on: the wrong side.

By the end of the eighteenth century the vogue for historic costume in drama was well under way. John Philip Kemble played Hamlet in Elizabethan dress in 1783 (Figure 6), and Talma, in Paris wore a sixteenth-century German academic gown (Figure 7). This was in Jean-François Ducis’ adaptation of the play, in which authenticity was otherwise not an issue: an urn containing old Hamlet’s ashes figures significantly in the action, although cremation in the Middle Ages and Renaissance was reserved for heretics. This *Hamlet*, in any case, had little enough to do with Shakespeare: Hamlet has been king from the outset, having succeeded his father on his death; Ducis’ ghost reveals that the queen, not Claudius, was his murderer; and at the end both Ophelia, who is Claudius’s daughter, not Polonius’s, and Hamlet remain alive.

The movement toward history was codified by James Robinson Planché’s archeologically correct designs for Charles Kemble’s *King John* in 1824. The playbill for this production declared that the play will be presented “with an attention to costume never before equalled on the English stage. Every character will appear in the precise habit of the period, the whole of the dresses and decorations being executed from indisputable authorities”—the authorities cited are not textual but material, visual, documentary: tomb effigies, royal seals, manuscript illuminations, all the fruits of Planché’s research

into costume history. Figure 8 shows a group of tomb effigies of medieval British royalty from Planché's *History of British Costume*, which went through many editions and became a standard reference work. These were the models Planché provided for Shakespeare. King John's effigy is on the far right; Figure 9 shows the king's costume in the 1824 production, based on it. Two decades later, in 1842, the costumes were used again in Macready's production of the same play. This was not parsimony; Macready's productions were quite elaborate. The costumes remained unchanged because they stamped both productions as authentic. This is what Planché did to theatre, and it gives a striking sense of what the attractions of theatre were now conceived to be.

Planché's work was a manifesto, backed by a genuine historical impulse and informed by an impressive body of scholarship. He also published "correct" costume designs for *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, and several other plays, for which he selected appropriate, if arbitrary, historical eras (he was especially indignant at the requirement that Hamlet wear black, because members of the royal family would not have worn mourning). The effect of this sort of historicising is, of course, to place the plays at a considerable distance from us—theatre becomes a mirror of the past, showing us how life was lived in historical eras. In Shakespeare's own theatre, though as we have seen, plays with classical settings had gestures toward the period, for the most part plays were costumed in Elizabethan dress – the Italy of *Romeo and Juliet* was a version of England. There were practical reasons for doing this, but it also meant that the plays were not distanced from the audience, in the way modern Shakespeare is when we do it in any sort of period costume, which is what, thanks to Planché, tends to seem natural to us.

Of course, even when we do the plays in period costume, there remains a problem about the period. The thrilling, visually stunning Franco Zeffirelli films of *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew* are set in fifteenth-century Verona and Padua, with historically accurate costumes and sets. Zeffirelli's décor really does work beautifully; but as a version of Shakespeare, there is nothing authentic about it: Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet wore the same clothing their audiences wore; their tragedy did not take place in the distant past, and the society of Verona was a recognisable version

of the society of London. If we try to be authentic, however, and emulate Shakespeare by dressing our productions in Elizabethan costumes, in the style of the original *Romeo and Juliet* depicted in the film *Shakespeare in Love*, we simply make the play into another period piece – it is still ancient history, although now the history is Shakespeare’s rather than that of the characters. Both sorts of historically correct costuming give a good sense of what the limits of authenticity are for us.

Zeffirelli employed an extremely knowledgeable costume historian for his *Romeo and Juliet*. In the ballroom scene, many of the costumes derive quite directly from Perugino paintings. The women’s headgear was especially striking, because the designer was willing to use authentic styles that risked looking faintly ridiculous to modern audiences. For *The Taming of the Shrew* Zeffirelli moved about half a century later in time, and went for sumptuousness in addition to authenticity, but there was lots of period detail – for example a courtesan who flirts with one of the newly arrived suitors is shown wearing chopines, fashionable high-soled shoes. They look preposterous to us (and constitute a visual joke in the film), but they are included precisely because they are authentic 1540 footwear of the Veneto – like Planché’s effigies, they give the film the stamp of authenticity. The women’s costumes were especially elaborate, but Elizabeth Taylor’s were less authentic than everyone else’s, because she insisted on having her own designer provide her clothes. Her dresses tended to be much less voluminous than everyone else’s, making her appear more slender, and thus, to modern eyes, more attractive than the other women in the film.

Shakespeare in Love did a beautiful re-creation of Elizabethan costumes. The climax of the film involves the first performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. This was, correctly, played in contemporary costume; that is, what went on onstage looked just like what went on offstage. But the film’s devotion to authenticity went only so far. Ben Affleck played the actor Edward Alleyn, who took the role of a very impressive Mercutio, and Joseph Fiennes played Shakespeare playing Romeo (which is probably incorrect). The costumes in Mercutio’s death scene are perfectly appropriate (Figure 10), but the hair is late twentieth-century short, Affleck’s a sexy brush cut, and Fiennes’s fashionably windblown. Elizabethan men, however,

wore their hair long, sometimes down to their shoulders. But the film says as clearly as possible that these are not Elizabethans, they are movie stars, and they have to look glamorous. Glamorous Elizabethan men had quite different hair styles.

Shakespeare plays are most often performed nowadays in something approximating modern dress, as a way of restoring that Elizabethan sense of immediacy, as in the very successful film of *Richard III* with Ian McKellen. This has become quite routine, though for audiences who do not see much Shakespeare and who know the plays, if at all, only from reading them, the modern costumes are a distraction because the language remains archaic – part of what makes Shakespeare a classic is that he is so firmly in the past. There are good reasons for using modern settings and costumes – the relations between the social classes, for example, become much more easily understood if the dress codes are modern rather than Elizabethan—but there is really no way around the discrepancy between the language and the setting, and little way of mitigating it. It is simply something the director has to hope the audience will get used to, and it seems worth taking the risk in order to avoid the sense that the play is safely canonical, merely a classic; in order to restore some of the drama's original energies. Updated Shakespeare has often been, in the twentieth century, highly charged politically – the incendiary productions of *Coriolanus* in Paris in 1934 and of *Macbeth* in East Berlin in 1982 had an authenticity that went beyond décor. In its own time Elizabethan theatre was always relevant to current issues, and was assumed to be intended as such, and the costumes themselves on Shakespeare's stage had a kind of authority that was not without its element of danger. I conclude with a passage from my book *Impersonations*.

When in *The Tempest* Prospero tempts Stefano and Trinculo to their destruction with a closet full of “glistering apparel” (4.1.193 s.d.) he invokes a central cultural topos. Caliban declares the garments to be “trash” (4.1.224); but they are trash only because the conspirators have not yet succeeded, and thus are not entitled to wear them. Robes of office, aristocratic finery, confirm and legitimate authority, they do not confer it. There is obviously, however, a widespread conviction in the culture that they do. Caliban may well be revealing here just how much of an outsider

he is—the costumes, after all, belong to Prospero. Prospero himself invests his cape with the enabling power of his magic: “Lie there, my art” (1.2.25). Analogously, the wardrobe of Henslowe’s company included “a robe for to go invisible,” asserting in a culturally specific manner how powerfully garments determined the way one was to be seen, and not seen. These fictions, moreover, reflected an economic reality: the theatre company had its largest investment, its major property, in its costumes; and the costumes were for the most part the real cast-off clothes of real aristocrats. As the legitimating emblems of authority, these garments possessed a kind of social reality within the culture that the actors, and indeed much of their audience, could never hope to have. The actors and characters were fictions, but the costumes were the real thing.



Fig. 1: Title page to *Henry VIII* from Nicholas Rowe's *Works of Shakespear*, 1709



Fig. 3: Macklin's Act 2 costume in *Macbeth*. Folger Shakespeare Library



M^{rs} YATES in the Character of Lady Macbeth . . .
Done from an Original Picture of the same size, in the Possession of
Her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland.
Printed for J. Smith, N^o 35 in Cheap-side, & R. Sayer, N^o 53 in Fleet-Street, 1769. 8

Fig. 4: Mary Ann Yates's Lady Macbeth, c. 1760, the model for Macklin's Lady Macbeth, Mrs Hartley. Folger Shakespeare Library



Fig. 5: Francesco Zuccarelli, *Macbeth, Banquo and the Witches*, c. 1760.
Folger Shakespeare Library



Fig. 6: John Philip Kemble's Elizabethan *Hamlet*, 1783. Folger Shakespeare Library



Fig. 7: François-Joseph Talma in Ducis' French adaptation of *Hamlet*.
Folger Shakespeare Library



Fig. 8: J.R. Planché, tomb effigies from the reign of King John, from
Planché 1834



Fig. 9: Planché's costume designs for King John and Queen Elinor, from Planché 1824



Fig. 10: Mercutio's death, from the film *Shakespeare in Love*

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Lascivious Grace: Seductive Evil in Shakespeare and Jonson

I begin with the conclusion of Shakespeare's Sonnet 40, the acknowledgment of betrayal and incorrigible faithlessness in the beloved young man, which is at the same time an acknowledgment of his irresistible attractiveness: "Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows, / Kill me with spites yet we must not be foes" (13-14).

"In whom all ill well shows": there is nothing in the sonnets to equal or counteract the seductive power of "lascivious grace", no sustaining counter-principle of virtue and fidelity — in Sonnet 144, about the poet's "two loves . . . of comfort and despair", even the poet's "good angel" is inevitably "fired out" by his bad one; and indeed, the implication is that the two angels have been lovers. Equivocation and ambivalence form a litany throughout the *Sonnets*, but the bad always wins. The poet of the *Sonnets* is megalomaniacal about the power of his verse, but given all the boasting about the defeat of time and the conferral of immortality, it is the abjectness of this poet that is striking, the repeated insistence that the beloved, even as he betrays the poet with a mistress or prefers a rival poet, is too good for him, that the poet-lover deserves the neglect he suffers, and that the love, however compelling, however much the source of a poetry more lasting than monuments, is nothing but a flattering dream.

Nevertheless, as I suggested in my essay "No Sense of an Ending" (2022), implicit in Shakespeare's sequence is an alternative scenario, in which the protagonist's abjection turns resentful, sarcastic, cynical, and very witty. This scenario is already suggested in the poems about the intruding mistress and the rival poet, and is fully articulated in the sonnets to the deceitful dark lady. The original *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, the volume in which the poems first appeared in 1609, in fact concludes in this way, with a long Spenserian lament called *A Lovers Complaint*. This may or may not

be by Shakespeare, but the publisher believed it was Shakespeare's, and more important, believed that it was an appropriate conclusion to the volume. I have discussed the poem in "No Sense of an Ending": *A Lovers Complaint* is spoken by a forsaken woman, seduced and abandoned by an eloquent charmer – the betrayed poet-lover has finally turned the tables, not only on his mistress, but also on all women, on all lovers. This plot begins where the *Sonnets* end, with betrayal and frustration. And as Shakespeare pursues and develops the theme in his drama, it shows the master of language and argument getting his own back, the dramatic poet avenging himself on the lyric subject. This poet says, if I can't make you love me I can make you hate me; if I can't give you life I can take it away. Dramatically, the *Sonnets* culminate not in triumphant creativity but in relentless malice and vindictiveness – the true poet of the *Sonnets* is not Prospero but Iago. The repeated lyric claim that "my friend and I are one" achieves a dangerous dramatic reality as Iago declares to Othello that "I am your own forever", and asserts that "In following him I follow but myself".

I developed this argument in an essay called "Othello and the End of Comedy", and the next section of this paper is based on that essay (2011, 83-100). Stephen Greenblatt long ago suggested, in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, that Iago, as the amoral manipulator and endlessly fertile improviser of plots was a figure for Shakespeare, but I am suggesting something much more psychologically and emotionally specific. In the most straightforward view of the plot, Iago is the agent of all the play's destructiveness and bad faith, the source of all the tragic energy – in short, the villain. A little less straightforwardly, he is certainly still the villain, but perhaps nevertheless not the agent and source at all, but merely the catalyst, externalising and articulating the destructive chaos that lies just beneath Othello's love and rationality, the chaos that he himself says is kept in check only by his love for Desdemona – rather like the witches in *Macbeth*, or, indeed, Lady Macbeth herself, who, however evil, are not the culprits. A lot depends on how far we want to regard Iago as a classic machiavel on the one hand, or as an extension of Othello on the other. The latter might seem to be a post-Renaissance conception, but in fact the play itself questions the simple view of Iago's malign responsibility for Othello's behaviour

when Emilia remarks that jealous souls “are not ever jealous for the cause, / But jealous for they are jealous” — Othello’s jealousy is not, then, simply the creation of Iago’s scheming. There is a good deal of self-interest in this piece of wisdom, of course, since Emilia herself has provided the trigger of Othello’s jealousy, the handkerchief, and is covering for both herself and her husband long after she understands quite clearly the mischief she has caused; but the observation is, nevertheless, also self-evidently true, and it is a truth around which Iago designs his scheme.

Villain and victim, in fact, have much more in common, understand each other much better, than husband and wife: it is clear that Iago’s cynical view of women as lustful, untrustworthy and characteristically unfaithful is, when the chips are down, Othello’s view also, and therefore Othello instinctively believes in Iago’s honesty, not in his wife’s — this is true from the first moment Desdemona’s fidelity is questioned; all Iago has to say is “I think Cassio’s an honest man”. One could argue, indeed, that the source of the tragedy is precisely in that gender bonding — in the fact that Othello’s primary loyalty is to his friend, not his wife; in the fact that Emilia chooses to betray her mistress, not her husband. But it is also possible to imagine this play without Iago: certainly all those elements of jealousy, self dramatisation, rage and barely controlled chaos that Iago elicits are aspects of Othello’s character clearly articulated from the outset.

In staging the play, to make Iago a sort of allegorical extension of Othello would, of course, make for a much more complex Othello than we are used to, one that would continually raise the question of how far the play’s claim that the tragedy is all Iago’s fault, which is essentially a claim that jealousy is explicable and reasonable — that men get jealous because villains steal handkerchiefs and tell lies — is borne out by the action. There are two ways of reading “In following him I follow but myself”: as Iago’s assertion of total self-interest in his relation to Othello, or alternatively, as an acknowledgment that, in a much deeper sense, they are inseparable. The bond can be construed as a love relationship, with Iago’s resentment that of a scorned lover, rejected in favor of Cassio on the one hand and Desdemona on the other, a rejection all the more painful because it has been so casual. The jealousy, then, in the first

instance would be Iago's. He presents himself again as a scorned lover when he accuses both Cassio and Othello of sleeping with his wife Emilia. This is basically the situation dramatised in the *Sonnets*, and if we take that sequence to be in any sense autobiographical, Shakespeare is depicting himself in Iago — not only as Greenblatt's "amoral manipulator and endlessly fertile improviser of plots", but as the sonnets' jealous lover as well: "So shall I live, believing thou art true / Like a deceived husband . . ." (93.1-2), but a cuckold who finally catches on.

If we are thinking of Shakespeare's dramaturgy in terms of autobiography, here is another proposition: we know that Burbage played Othello, but in Shakespeare's company who played the much larger role of Iago? Iago is one of the longest roles in Shakespeare — 1020 lines, almost 250 lines longer than Othello. Only Hamlet, the longest role by far, and Richard III are longer; these three are the only roles that are over a thousand lines (though Henry V almost makes it, at 999). For comparison, the whole of *The Comedy of Errors* is only 1750 lines long, and *Macbeth* just over 2000. Iago is a third of his play. Could it be a part that Shakespeare the actor wrote for himself?

Probably the answer is no; the one Shakespearean role we think we know Shakespeare played was Adam in *As You Like It*, and a much more apocryphal tradition has him as the Ghost in *Hamlet*. These stories at least suggest that the roles he took in his own plays were small ones; and John Lowin, who we know played the villainous Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi* and the ill-tempered Morose in *Epicoene*, had joined the company in 1603, and would therefore have been available. Nevertheless the *Sonnets* provide an inescapable gloss on all the painful ramifications of the assumption that "My friend and I are one". The identity, the interchangeability, of Othello and Iago has been a significant part of stage history for centuries, perhaps always. If the original Iago was not Shakespeare, and even if it was Lowin, did Burbage nevertheless, like Garrick, Edmund Kean, Kemble, Macready, Fechter, Irving, Edwin Booth, Olivier, even, unlikely as it sounds, Gielgud, play both roles, and were the roles, from the beginning, interchangeable; did the great actor always want to be both? Virtuoso performers, starting with Edmund Kean and Charles Mayne Young, and including Macready and Samuel Phelps, Edwin Booth and Henry Irving, Richard Burton

and John Neville, have even alternated the roles, sometimes from night to night, playing out, in the most literal way, “Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago” (1.1.56). In fact, Kean, as Iago, refused to switch after he saw the first night of Young’s Othello, convinced he could never equal it – Iago’s envy was in this case the very essence of performance itself.

Throughout the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries, the machiavellian Iago, innately evil and an obvious extension of Richard III, often outfitted, in the absence of a hunchback, with diabolically bushy eyebrows and black wig, was standard; but from the time of Fechter and Irving, Iago has tended to be the really complex character in the play. A good deal of the cumulative effect of the drama depends on how the actor decides to play him. Most productions have made him complex but unattractive, saturnine, insinuating, crude, graceless – most of all, not a gentleman. In such performances, the real energy of the role goes into the villainy – it is a melodramatic energy, undeniably effective, but it simplifies the play, makes him a villain like Richard III, where his villainy is in every sense his defining characteristic. In the case of Richard III, his success is represented first as a political phenomenon, where he is supported by people who are either naively trusting or think he is horrible but will do them some good, and second – notoriously, in the wooing of Lady Anne – as a kind of mesmeric magic, because he is so obviously villainous. The problem with treating Iago this way is that such a reading does not make enough distinction between the public and the private Iago – Richard is always a villain, but until the final scene, we know much more about Iago than any of the characters do, and there has to be some reason established dramatically for why everyone finds him so implicitly trustworthy. Dramatically, making him unattractive and graceless accounts for his hostility and resentment, but does nothing to explain his extraordinary persuasiveness.

As I stage the play in my own mind, he is attractive and very charming. The only performance I have ever seen that was anything like this was Kenneth Branagh’s, in the film with Laurence Fishburn as Othello. There were lots of problems with this film – Fishburn looked wonderful, but didn’t do much with the verse; Irene Jacob’s English was so heavily accented that she might have been in some

other play — but the Iago was a revelation: easygoing, affable, good looking, affectionate, an instant best friend, somebody you wanted to confide in and have around. In this performance, the melodrama is saved for the soliloquies, so that Iago is completely different in public and in private. Branagh gives the film the sense of a stage performance by talking directly to the camera (rather than “thinking” his soliloquies); he plays with the audience, taking them into his confidence, making them his accomplices, charming them, flirting with them, just as he does not so much persuade Roderigo and Cassio, but woos them.

I would even take this a step farther, and take the analogy of the *Sonnets* into account, making Iago an attractive gay man seriously in love with Othello, and Othello a narcissist, not at all averse to being adored, fully trusting Iago because he trusts his own attractiveness; knowing, moreover, that he does not have to promote Iago, because he is perfectly aware of his sexual power over his subordinate. (My use of the shorthand term ‘gay’ is anachronistic only in the sense that the term is modern; there have always been men who fell in love with other men.) The sexual dynamic here would be a two way affair, and when, in this production of mine, Othello elicits from Iago the words of the marriage vow, “I am your own forever”, he is quite conscious of what he is doing. After all, throughout the play Othello is under the impression that he is using Iago, not the other way round — “Prove my love a whore”; “Within these three days let me hear thee say / That Cassio’s not alive”. The fantasy of replacing Desdemona with Iago as his wife is in my production parallel to Iago’s fantasy of lying awake in bed with Cassio asleep (or pretending to be) and sexually excited, taking Iago for Desdemona (or pretending to). Is Othello’s fury at this solely at the idea of Cassio imagining he is in bed with Desdemona? Is the idea of Cassio actually making love to Iago no part of it? Quite possibly the answer is no; nevertheless, one may resist the sexual implications, but the homoeroticism is undeniable: it is obvious that the crucial relationships in both these episodes are between the men. As in the *Sonnets*, who knows how much is implied by “My friend and I are one”, “I am your own forever”?

Two friends to whom I have proposed this haven’t liked it; both objected that making Iago gay explains too much, that the malignity

ought to be left motiveless. I am surprised that love is assumed to constitute more of an explanation than hatred; but in any case, Iago does explain at some length why he hates Othello — the problem is really that he offers too many motives, not too few. Cassio has a daily beauty in his life that makes Iago's ugly, Othello has preferred Cassio to him, Othello and Cassio have been to bed with his wife — all the explanations boil down to envy and jealousy; and as Romeo (that is, Shakespeare) says, "Here's much to do with hate, but more with love". Coleridge's point in characterising Iago as "motiveless malignity" was surely that the explanations don't really explain anything, don't produce a rational motive, produce only jealousy, or hatred (or love), not that they aren't there. Romeo cites not only the inseparability of love and hate, but the motivelessness of both as well: "Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate, / O anything of nothing first create!" (1.2.174-6).

In "Othello and the End of Comedy" I cited some productions that have in fact accounted for Iago's behaviour by suggesting that he was gay. Tyrone Guthrie in 1938 had Laurence Olivier as a homosexual Iago furtively longing for Ralph Richardson's Othello, though no critics caught on to the fact that Iago was supposed to be gay, and Guthrie shortly abandoned the interpretation. Nevertheless, Olivier declared the production a disaster (the gay Iago was obviously not the culprit). In Terry Hands's 1985 RSC production with Ben Kingsley as Othello and David Suchet as Iago, Iago was widely perceived as gay, and the performance was well received, not least because by 1985 it was permissible to acknowledge publicly that someone was gay. Hands apparently did not intend Iago to be gay, and was surprised at the reviews. David Suchet, however, in a thoughtful interview about the performance in one of the *Players of Shakespeare* volumes, says that he considered the possibility at some length (Jackson 1988, 179-99). He decided that the account of the night spent with Cassio is a lie, though a significant one. He thought it quite conceivable that Iago and Cassio may in fact have been lovers, and that Othello may well be jealous of the idea that they have been to bed together — Suchet was, in short, on to my idea long before it occurred to me, and I am interested to see that an intelligent and thoughtful actor seriously considered it as a way of making the character work psychologically. By the

end of the twentieth century, we had an openly gay Mercutio who goes partying in drag in Baz Luhrman's 1996 *Romeo and Juliet*. My students like this, and when I asked what they liked about it one young woman explained that "cool gay guys are really neat". I want my Iago to be a cool gay guy, a Iago who is all the more dangerous because both Othello and more than half the audience find him attractive. The play's vice then becomes its prime dramatic virtue — as sonnet 119 sums it up,

O benefit of ill! Now I find true
 That better is by evil still made better;
 And ruined love, when it is built anew,
 Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.
 So I return rebuked to my content,
 And gain by ills thrice more than I have spent.
 (9-14)

Shakespeare's alter-ego, the playwright who takes this principle to heart and makes vice into the central dramatic virtue, is surely Ben Jonson, for whom the Iago figure, the schemer, the clever scoundrel, is the great comic principle. Arguably this notion is central to the history of theatre itself — think of the ubiquitous machinations that propel the comedy of Aristophanes, refined and personified into the scheming, scamming slave-heroes of Roman comedy. A millennium later one may have gone to morality plays for the good of one's soul, to see virtue triumphant and evil vanquished, but most of the energy, and therefore the pleasure, of those plays in performance was precisely in the vice figures — iniquity was where the fun was. That same vicious energy remained the central comic principle in the tragedy of *Doctor Faustus*, and those scenes of diabolical fun, in which the interaction of humanity with the infernal powers produces not the fear of damnation but the pleasures of farce, were the scenes that were continually augmented over the several centuries of the play's life on the stage. Even *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's most powerful dramatisation of incarnate evil, was within a decade of its composition being expanded with interpolated scenes of dances and songs for the witches — by the 1660s Pepys could declare it "a most excellent play in all respects, but especially in divertisement", though he acknowledged that that

was “a strange perfection in a tragedy” (1974, 8.7). Most tragedies weren’t this much fun, and the divertimento was provided by the incarnations of evil.

Jonson was certainly a moralist, and his ethical pronouncements are ubiquitous throughout his poetry. But if we consider his two masterpieces *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, the moral claims appear ambiguous at best. The schemers are, of course, not diabolical machiavels but small time crooks; but they epitomise a vision of society as thoroughly corrupt, and if we see that as something less than evil we only reveal our own complicity in it. Jonson makes the implication explicit in *The Devil Is an Ass*, his morality play of 1616, which follows *Bartholomew Fair* and sums up a decade of social indictment. In it a devil is sent to earth to do the Devil’s work, and is thoroughly conned and gulled by his mortal prey: in the practice of villainy, the diabolical is no match for the human — everyone is guilty. That this is a subject for comedy indicates how naturalised the assumption was for Jonson’s age.

There is a seriously divided aesthetic in Jonson. Consider the poetry of *The Alchemist*. On the one hand, Jonson’s fondness for epigram is on display — he declared his epigrams “the ripest of my studies” (1616, 767), and Martial was his favourite poet; and certainly when Subtle, Face and Doll are fighting there are lots of real zingers — but on the other hand, think of the compulsive aggregation of the big extended speeches such as Sir Epicure Mammon’s fantasies of fulfilled desire, which work like operatic arias. In the same way, in his greatest poems, Jonson writes extended eulogies to the lavish hospitality of the Sidneys at Penshurst or of Sir Robert Wroth, or celebrates the sumptuous food promised in the poem *Inviting a Friend to Supper*. Mammon’s arias go on and on, but he isn’t a bore, he’s a crazy genius — those are high points in the play. Sometimes Jonson makes himself out to be an ethical stoic, idealising withdrawal from the world, but much more often he is the most materialistic poet in English: he loves the world; especially he loves things — Mammon or *Volpone* speak with the voice of early modern capitalism. They worship wealth. *Volpone* opens with a hymn to money: “Good morning to the day, and next, my gold. / Open the shrine, that I may see my saint”. What such characters want is the best of everything, which means not platonic ideals, but the rarest and richest

consumer goods that money can buy. The voice of the epicure is also the voice of the collector and connoisseur; these plays are all about taste, and whatever your ideals are, you can't fulfill them without a great deal of money. Even Jonson's poetry celebrating the virtues of his patrons is about money – the boundless hospitality of the Sidney family or the taste and generosity of the Countess of Bedford depend on a very large income.

Where is the moral centre of any of these plays? Lovewit, the offstage master of *The Alchemist*, sounds like a name for the hero of a play about the intellect, but he is merely the beneficiary of the clever scoundrel he employs, who buys off his potential indignation with a rich widow to marry. The wit he loves is the ingenuity of his servant the con-man Face; and though the relentlessly sceptical Pertinax Surly keeps saying he won't be gulled, in fact nobody in the play sees through the deceptions. Is there a moral centre in this play? All the energy is clearly in the material goods on the one hand and the ingenuity of the plotting on the other; Subtle, Face and Doll are essentially playwrights, the endlessly creative inventors of plots, just like Jonson. The ethical figures are there to be either indulgent, like Lovewit, or gulled and abused, like Ananias. In the same way, the good people in *Volpone*, Celia and Bonario, don't win because they're good, they win because the fox outfoxes himself; the con game in *The Alchemist* ends because the schemes fall apart from their own complexity. The endings, moreover, are profoundly ambiguous: Mosca loses in the end, but he could just as easily end up a millionaire; one thing goes wrong. Face wins in the end, but he could just as easily end up in jail; one thing goes right. If Jonson had written a version of *Othello* it would be all about Iago, but one wonders how the play would have ended. It is not surprising that one of Jonson's earliest plays, which he chose not to preserve, was a *Richard Crookback*, a tragedy about Richard III. The villainous hero was where he started – the subject was a natural one for him.

What is the moral to Jonson's comedies of evil? It is certainly not "be virtuous". If you're a crook, be smart, but don't overdo it. If you're greedy, don't be a megalomaniac. Be sceptical; but you'll be cheated anyway. Above all, choose your servants very carefully, but don't trust them too far. Is Jonson a cynic? Hardly: he takes too much pleasure in his inventions.

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Completing *Hamlet*

1.

Hamlet is probably the most famous play in literature, thoroughly international in its appeal, admired and imitated in Asian cultures as well as in the west. Its fame in its own time may be considered a matter of record, though the record has certainly been overstated; and that is a good place to begin. For a reading public, several Shakespeare plays were considerably more in demand during Shakespeare's lifetime: *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Pericles*, all went through many more editions than did *Hamlet*, and both *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* were by a considerable margin Shakespeare's best known and most widely quoted works. It is true that there are far more allusions to *Hamlet* recorded in *The Shakspeare Allusion Book* than to any other play, but many of these are dubious, merely bits of conventional wisdom, reflecting primarily a desire on the part of Shakespeare's nineteenth-century editors for a plethora of *Hamlet* allusions, but also revealing how full the play is of commonplaces. Still, there is no question of the play's popularity when it was new. Gabriel Harvey, apparently writing before the play was in print, said it pleased "the wiser sort", and a certain "A. S." in 1604 praising "friendly Shakespeare's tragedies", adds that theatre "should please all, like Prince Hamlet" – everybody liked the play (Ingelby et al. 1932, 56, 133). If we scrutinise the thirty-four citations to *Hamlet* before 1623 in the *Allusion Book*, however, only six turn out to be unquestionably quotations from the play. Of these, three refer to the ghost beneath the stage crying "Swear", one refers to Hamlet mad and in shirt-sleeves, one quotes the Player's Pyrrhus speech, and one the Player Queen's "In second husband let me be accursed /

None wed the second but who killed the first". If we may take these few examples as indicative, the most memorable thing in the play in its own time was the ghost. The most substantial reference to the play during Shakespeare's lifetime, though not noted as such in *The Shakspeare Allusion Book*, is Robert Armin's parody in *The Two Maids of More-clacke*, which, as a gloss on *Hamlet* written by the principal clown of Shakespeare's company, surely deserves more attention than it has received.

The seventeenth century found little fault with the play. Davenant revising it for the Restoration stage did not tinker with the plot, and confined his efforts to cutting — as both Shakespeare himself and his contemporaries must also have done. The greatest actor of the Restoration Thomas Betterton throughout his long career made the role particularly his own, and was hugely successful in it — Pepys saw the play four times in the ten years recorded in the diary, and admired it, though all his praise is specifically for Betterton. Dryden deplored the rhetorical excesses of the Player's speech ("What a pudder is here kept in raising the expression of trifling thoughts"), but rescued the rest of the play by declaring the passage an interpolation by some other poet. Seriously negative criticism of the play began only in the eighteenth century. Voltaire notoriously called it "a crude and barbarous piece, . . . the outgrowth of the imagination of a drunken savage" (Phelps Bailey 1964, 12) and had a great deal of fun summarising its plot. The critique was widely ridiculed in England, but Samuel Johnson, the least bardolatrous of Shakespeare's editors, was scarcely less pejorative, and distinctly condescending. Declaring the play's chief merit to be variety, he finds it deficient in plausibility.

Hamlet is, through the whole play, rather an instrument than an agent. After he has, by the stratagem of the play, convicted the King, he makes no attempt to punish him, and his death is at last effected by an incident which Hamlet has no part in producing. The catastrophe is not very happily produced; the exchange of weapons is rather an expedient of necessity, than a stroke of art. A scheme might easily have been formed, to kill Hamlet with the dagger, and Laertes with the bowl.

1 From the preface to his adaptation of *Troilus and Cressida* (1679), B2v.

The poet is accused of having shewn little regard to poetical justice, and may be charged with equal neglect of poetical probability. The apparition left the regions of the dead to little purpose; the revenge which he demands is not obtained but by the death of him that was required to take it; and the gratification which would arise from the destruction of an usurper and a murderer, is abated by the untimely death of Ophelia, the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious. (Raleigh 1929, 196)

Johnson exemplified a critical skepticism, increasingly strong throughout the century, regarding the play's seriousness. At the beginning of the next century Coleridge rejected such views with the voice of a revisionist; but he also did so with surprising vehemence, characterising the critical consensus of the previous age not merely as misguided, but as shallow, stupid, arrogant, vulgar and indolent.

The seeming inconsistencies in the conduct and character of Hamlet have long exercised the conjectural ingenuity of critics; and, as we are always loth to suppose that the cause of defective apprehension is in ourselves, the mystery has been too commonly explained by the very easy process of setting it down as in fact inexplicable, and by resolving the phenomenon into a misgrowth or lusus of the capricious and irregular genius of Shakspeare. The shallow and stupid arrogance of these vulgar and indolent decisions I would fain do my best to expose. I believe the character of Hamlet may be traced to Shakspeare's deep and accurate science in mental philosophy. Indeed, that this character must have some connection with the common fundamental laws of our nature may be assumed from the fact, that Hamlet has been the darling of every country in which the literature of England has been fostered. In order to understand him, it is essential that we should reflect on the constitution of our own minds. (Coleridge 1904, 343)

The play's essential seriousness here has to do primarily with Shakespeare's delineation of Hamlet's mental state — the character is to be taken seriously because its psychology is realistic. But it is not really Hamlet's psychology that is the basic issue:

Now one of Shakspeare's modes of creating characters is, to conceive any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess, and then to

place himself, Shakspeare, thus mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances. In Hamlet he seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses, and our meditation on the workings of our minds, an equilibrium between the real and the imaginary worlds. (344)

Hamlet's excellence here lies in the truth of its psychological insight; but more particularly, the delineation of Hamlet's psychology is beyond criticism because the psychology is Shakespeare's own — the play shows "himself, Shakspeare, thus mutilated or diseased", the playwright placed in Hamlet's circumstances. This is an odd critical move, quite unnecessary for the progress of the argument, but it helps to explain the vehemence with which any negative observations are rejected. Reservations about Hamlet impugn Shakespeare's knowledge of himself, and Coleridge the advocate conceives himself speaking with the authority of Shakespeare.

By the twentieth century, however, there was more to Shakespeare than psychology and more to drama than character. The play's philosophical seriousness (as opposed to its truth to life) is a product of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of the assumption that Hamlet's meditations and the revelations of the ghost imply a whole metaphysical system — is this why, according to Gabriel Harvey, *Hamlet* pleased "the wiser sort"? T. S. Eliot was dissatisfied with the play, asserting that, despite the soliloquies with all their overt philosophising, the action was insufficiently motivated, and Eliot introduced a term that has entered the critical language: Hamlet's emotional state lacked an "objective correlative" — the phrase served to account less for Hamlet's problem, or for a perceived problem in Shakespeare's dramaturgy, than for our problems with the play, its failure to deliver what by the early twentieth century we had come to want from it, a solid anchor in a sea of doubt and alienation.² Half a century later the metaphysics and the prevailing sense of loss had become critical virtues, evidence in the move to historicise Shakespeare's own psychology

2 See "Hamlet and His Problems" in Eliot 1920. The term "objective correlative" was first used by the painter and art critic Washington Allston in the 1840s to describe the relation of the mind to external reality; see the Introductory Discourse to his *Lectures on Art* (1850).

and embed Hamlet's scepticism in his studies at Wittenberg and the intellectual movements of the Protestant reformation. In this reading the ghost of the murdered father emerging from Catholic purgatory was England's past returning to haunt the present.

2.

But in fact, Coleridge to the contrary notwithstanding, even for character-based criticism motivation has always been an issue in the play. If Hamlet's father is the problem, why is he so focused on his mother? Why does he delay avenging his father's murder? Why is he in such a funk? Why does he behave so badly to Ophelia? Ernest Jones, following a suggestion of Freud's, answered these questions by invoking the Oedipus Complex.³ The argument as Jones presented it relied more heavily on generalisations about human nature than on textual analysis, but it did not misrepresent the play. It has, however, enabled any number of increasingly steamy sex scenes between Hamlet and his mother in modern productions. In the 1948 film, in their first scene together, Eileen Herlie's Gertrude gives Laurence Olivier's Hamlet a deep, wet kiss as the court watches; a generation later, in the BBC production, Derek Jacobi's Hamlet dry-humps Claire Bloom's Gertrude as he harangues her on her bed in her bedchamber. This presumably was not what Jones and Freud had in mind: the whole point about the Oedipus Complex is that it is repressed. There is, however, more evidence for its presence in the play than Jones or Freud were aware. Hamlet himself is quite explicit about it, berating himself in his final soliloquy for his inaction: "How stand I then, / That have a father killed, a mother stained . . ." (4.4.56-7). Hamlet's ambiguous syntax accuses himself of his uncle's crimes; he is the parricide and the incestuous son. Freud perhaps had read the play only in German, in which the double syntax would not have been apparent; but how did an anglophone psychoanalyst looking for Oedipus miss this? Is there perhaps something more to the argument that is being repressed?

3 Originally published as "The Oedipus-Complex as An Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery: A Study in Motive" in *The American Journal of Psychology* 21.1 (1910); subsequently expanded as *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949).

None of this bears on the more basic question, the first question students ask, of why Hamlet is not king to begin with. Why did he not he succeed his father? In a provocative reading of the play, Margreta de Grazia makes this the missing key: he has been disinherited, in violation of every expectation. This, not his father's death and his mother's o'er-hasty marriage, is the objective correlative that explains everything (de Grazia 2007).

The reading is tempting, but there is actually little in the play to support it. Such an argument makes more sense to us than it would have done for Shakespeare's audience; royal succession was not invariably determined by primogeniture (e.g. in Shakespeare's lifetime in the cases of the Holy Roman Emperor and the Elector Palatine), and King James himself was not the only or even the obvious claimant to succeed Queen Elizabeth. He became king only because Elizabeth named him her heir, and he was supported by the people in power. Questions of succession were very much the stuff of melodrama. At the beginning of *Macbeth*, Duncan seals his own fate by declaring his son Malcolm the heir to his throne, in violation of the Scottish practice at the time, which was determined not by primogeniture but by tanistry, or election from among the royal kinsmen. It is to the point that nobody in the play thereafter supports the claims of Malcolm until he returns at the head of an invading English army. Neither does anyone in *Hamlet* imply that Hamlet ought to be king, or that young Fortinbras should have succeeded his father on the throne of Norway.

It is certainly the case, however, that the dynastic plot as such is to be taken seriously. What does it mean to take the play seriously? Both Voltaire and Johnson intentionally trivialised *Hamlet* by reducing it to its plot, but there are, obviously, more ways than one of approaching the plot, some less reductive than others. The real problem, since it is a Shakespeare tragedy we are dealing with, is that no version of the action seems sufficiently heroic to fulfil our expectations of the genre. The hero is a romantic student. He is told he must become an avenger; he says over and over that he is not fit for the task. The play is about his effort to convert himself into the son his father's ghost demands; it is not until the final scene of the play that he mentions that he ever wished to be king, that Claudius "popped in between th'election and my hopes" (5.2.64)

— this is something new, and unexpected; it comes as part of his transformation into the good son. His desire to be king indicates that he is prepared at last to be the avenging hero, which he does, more or less, succeed in doing; and Fortinbras, ascending the Danish throne himself, acknowledges Hamlet's transformation in an ironically contrafactual eulogy: "he was likely, had he been put on, / To have proved most royal".

How exactly Hamlet reaches this point, however, is left unclear. How does the neurasthenic youth to whom "this goodly frame the earth seems . . . a sterile promontory, . . . a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" (2.2.269-73) become the hero for whom "there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow", for whom "the readiness is all" (5.2.198-200)? *Hamlet* is a play, we might say, that from moment to moment wants completion, calls out for us to fill in the blanks. We undertake to do this through critical readings, complex editorial projects, commentary and massive elucidation; but historically we have also done it more directly, through rewriting and restaging, a strategy that has always been part of the performing tradition, and continues to the present day.

3.

I focus now on two major examples, alternative approaches to the problem of filling in the blanks. In 1769 Jean-François Ducis produced a French *Hamlet*, the first theatrical version of a Shakespeare play in France. It was in effect a response to Voltaire's critique, a *Hamlet* imbued with the principles of French classical drama. Ducis passionately admired Shakespeare, though he knew no English; he read the play in the truncated version of Pierre Antoine de la Place. In fact, Ducis' *Hamlet* has little in common with Shakespeare's beyond the basic situation, but — or perhaps therefore — it was hugely successful, especially after a radical revision for Talma in 1803 (there were at least four versions of the script).⁴ The play was rendered thoroughly decorous, losing much of the variety for which Johnson had admired

⁴ There are two editions recording the four versions: *Hamlet* (Paris, 1770), and the collected *Oeuvres*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1812; *Hamlet* is in vol. 1).

it; but it gained a real Racinian intensity. In the earliest of Ducis's versions, the ghost made several brief appearances; but within a year, by the time the text was published in 1770, he was eliminated as a character, communicating with Hamlet only in dreams and visions. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Laertes and Fortinbras were gone, as were the Players and the play within the play and all the problems with Norway. There was no voyage to England or encounter with the pirates or suicide of Ophelia, and hence no gravediggers or memories of Yorick. Hamlet has, from the beginning, succeeded to his father's throne, though because of his *pénible ennui* Gertrude is ruling in his place, until he regains his equilibrium. Claudius is *premier prince du sang*, and he and Gertrude are not married — their relationship therefore is adulterous but not incestuous, and possibly therefore more acceptable to French audiences. Ophelia is the daughter of Claudius, not Polonius, who is a minor character, and Gertrude has a confidante named Elvire, the only totally invented character in the play. The principal figures are Hamlet, Gertrude, Claudius, and Horatio, who has been renamed Norceste. In the earlier versions of the plot, Hamlet tells Norceste of the ghost's revelation of his murder at the hands of Claudius and Gertrude — Ducis' Gertrude is fully implicated; indeed, it was she who administered the poison, though the plot was Claudius's. Norceste and Hamlet resolve to test the truth of the ghost's story by having Hamlet confront the queen with the urn containing her husband's ashes, and demanding that she swear on it that she is innocent. She avoids adding perjury to murder by fainting, which Hamlet interprets correctly as a confession; but when she revives, Hamlet immediately forgives her:

Ah, revenez à vous,
 Voyez un Fils en pleurs embrasser vos genoux:
 Ne désespérez point de la bonté céleste.
 Rien n'est perdu pour vous si le remord vous reste.
 Votre crime est énorme, exécration, odieux;
 Mais il n'est pas plus grand que la bonté des Dieux.

[Ah revive; see, / your son in tears embraces your knees. / Do not despair of divine goodness. / You have lost nothing if you still have remorse. / Your crime is tremendous, execrable, hateful, / but it is not greater than the gods' goodness.]

Retribution nevertheless comes quickly: Claudius enters at the beginning of Act 5 to say that during the night he has killed the now dangerously remorseful queen. His daughter Ophelia enters and denounces him. She is escorted out under guard. Polonius urges swift action against Hamlet and Norceste, and goes off to marshal Claudius's supporters. Hamlet appears, saying that he has been led to Claudius by his father's ghost. Claudius throws open a door to reveal the body of Gertrude, and summons his followers, but as they rush in Hamlet stabs Claudius, and dares the others to attack him. They hold off, and Hamlet declares "Mon père est satisfait". To conclude the play, Ophelia enters with Norceste, and is shown the body of her father — "Ah! Qu'as tu fait, barbare?", to which Hamlet replies "Mon devoir", my duty; "Mais je suis homme et Roi": he has at last become a man and the king.

In the revision for Talma, done in 1803, an ingenious adaptation of Shakespeare's Play-within-the-play scene precedes Hamlet's confrontation of the queen with the urn. Norceste has recently returned from England, where the king has been poisoned. He and Hamlet decide to test the ghost's revelations by reporting the story of the murder, which they adapt to the present circumstances by ascribing the crime to motives of ambition and "une flamme adultère", and seeing whether Claudius and Gertrude display any incriminating reactions. Claudius is unmoved as Hamlet tells the story, but the queen is clearly troubled. In this version of Ducis' play Claudius does not kill Gertrude, but accuses Hamlet of the murder of the old king, and in the final act arrives with soldiers to arrest him. He is forestalled by Norceste leading a mob of Hamlet's supporters, shouting, in the best revolutionary fashion, "Peuple, sauvez Hamlet!" Claudius is promptly dispatched, and the queen resolves her own problems by committing suicide — or at least trying to do so, since in at least one of the later versions of the play she is still alive to speak the final lines. In all versions, Hamlet survives to rule over the Danes.

This *Hamlet*, however eccentric in relation to Shakespeare's original, addresses a number of genuine critical issues, and not only those relating to French classical decorum. Hamlet here is king from the beginning (solving the problem that occupies de Grazia), and most of the delay in the execution of the revenge, which has troubled critics since the eighteenth century, results from the difficulties of

eliciting a confession from Gertrude — the confession here really is necessary, since Ducis' ghost, as far as Hamlet is aware, is simply a dream. But the confrontation of the queen with the urn does more than confirm the reliability of the dream. It addresses a real problem in Shakespeare, adding to the play a scene that, even in Shakespeare's own time, was felt to be missing, a scene that would provide an answer to the question of the queen's complicity in her husband's murder. In Shakespeare's play, when Hamlet goes to the queen's bedchamber after the Play scene, he still lacks two essential pieces of information: whether Gertrude was committing adultery with Claudius before his father died, and more important, whether the queen was implicated in the murder, or even knew about it. These issues have been left ambiguous in the Ghost's account — the Ghost refers to Claudius as "that adulterate beast", which can mean either adulterous or simply foul (the three other times Shakespeare uses the word, it means adulterous); and instructs Hamlet to ignore the question of Gertrude's guilt, to "leave her to heaven". How guilty, then, is Gertrude, and what is she guilty of? But Hamlet raises neither question, and it turns out that what he really wants from his mother is not an assurance of her innocence but only her promise not to sleep with her husband any more.

But very soon in the play's history, something was felt to be lacking here. The first quarto, a shortened and somewhat rationalised version of the play, perhaps an earlier version, or perhaps assembled from memory by a group of actors, and published in 1603, adds a bit to the bedchamber scene in which Gertrude unequivocally asserts her innocence — of the murder at least; the question of adultery is again left to heaven. In a later scene with no parallel in the second quarto (1604) or the folio, Horatio tells the queen of Hamlet's return from England, and she agrees to join in the plot against the king.⁵ All this still leaves open the question of Hamlet's singleminded focus on his mother instead of his uncle, but in Ducis that is simply enough accounted for: she, not Claudius, was the murderer.

Ducis provides a version of the story with much less for critics to complain about, infinitely fewer puzzles and loose ends. The French

5 Shakespeare 2006, 11.85-6. The scene between Horatio and Gertrude is scene 14.

Hamlet offers, in its way, a satisfying sense of completeness, not least in allowing the hero his ultimate triumph. To indignant critics who deplore Ducis' presumptuousness in rewriting Shakespeare, one can only point to Talma's success in the role, and observe that adapters have been at work on *Hamlet* from its very inception. Modern commentators have, on the whole, preferred to deal with the play's puzzles through elucidation and commentary, rather than through theatrical revision — we tend now to prefer bibliographical explanations (and revisions) to narrative ones, thereby moving the play increasingly away from the stage and toward the book and the putative manuscript behind it. But given the immense length of its text, *Hamlet* in performance has always been incomplete, and to provide a sense of completeness, at least for a satisfactory evening at theatre, has always required not only major cuts but often discreet additions as well.

Hamlet is often claimed to be the first dramatic character with an inner life, a genuine psychology; and he certainly claims, in his soliloquies, to have one. Nevertheless, we have argued for centuries about his motivations: that crucial bit of his psychology is missing. To provide motivation became increasingly the task of the actor in search of a psychologically credible character; and since the psychologically credible changes from age to age, Hamlet has been the most mercurial of figures. Garrick notoriously employed a pneumatic wig for his first sight of the ghost, so that his hair could stand on end. The lines, for Garrick, required this additional bit of business, which was considered sensationally realistic at the time — today, it would be a joke. In contrast, Olivier's beautiful 1948 film presented a melancholy and contemplative Hamlet in his first scene at court, a psychologically consistent and entirely persuasive character. The persuasiveness depended, however, on the excision of about a third of Hamlet's lines from the scene, including all the sarcasm and wit — completeness here was the enemy of credibility.

4.

Hamlet the book then. It is only as a text that we can have the complete play; but what text of *Hamlet* can be said to be complete?

Surely the impulse to conflate quarto and folio texts of *Hamlet* (as of *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*) springs from a conviction that none of the individual texts is complete: the second quarto includes 230 lines not in the folio, the folio includes seventy lines not in the quarto. Scholarly editions aspire to completeness through their inclusion of alternatives and textual variants (as if a textual history of Shakespeare were anything more than a history of departures from a lost original); but in the case of *Hamlet* we want more than any of the surviving texts can supply, and not only more text — explanations for his psychology, what he studied at Wittenberg, what he really felt about Ophelia, whether he was really mad, why he was still at university at the age of thirty . . . the questions are endless.

It is no surprise, then, that *Hamlet* was refigured through an idea of comprehensiveness into the most monumental book of the twentieth century. Count Harry Kessler's Cranach Press *Hamlet* was published in Weimar in a German edition in 1929 and in an English edition in 1930. For this tremendously ambitious project, Kessler commissioned a new type based on a font used in the Mainz Psalter of 1457. The stage designer, actor and artist Edward Gordon Craig was engaged to produce illustrative woodcuts; the book was printed in a strictly limited edition on handmade paper, with a few copies also on vellum. In 1910, Craig had collaborated with Stanislavsky on a *Hamlet* for the Moscow Art Theatre. For this, he designed a nonrealistic stage, the central element of which was a set of complex, moveable screens. The collaboration was, from the outset, not a success — Craig's abstract theatre was the wrong vehicle for Stanislavsky's intensely psychologised, character-centered view of drama; moreover, the screens could not be got to work properly and kept falling down. But the concept remained with him, and the stage he could not create for Stanislavsky he realised in large measure for Kessler.

Kessler's conception was to present *Hamlet* in a Renaissance setting; the book would be a reflection of the historical *Hamlet* — not, however, the *Hamlet* of the quartos, the Shakespeare folio, or (least of all) a putative "real" *Hamlet*; but a bibliographic embodiment of the towering monument to Renaissance culture that *Hamlet* had become. It would complete the idea of *Hamlet*. So the models for the book were the masterpieces of the great fifteenth- and sixteenth-

century presses — the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, the Gutenberg and Koberger bibles, the great Estienne and Plantin editions of the classics. It is significant that Kessler's typeface was based not on a font from Shakespeare's age, but on the grandest of the early German models: this Hamlet was the German intellectual, the Wittenberg student, the humanist philosopher and scholar. The design of the book was that of a very grand late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century scholarly edition: the text was in the centre of the page, and in the margins around it, in smaller type, related material was placed. In sixteenth-century editions, the marginal material would have consisted of commentary and notes; Kessler's marginalia were the play's main sources, the *Hamlet* story in the Latin chronicle of Saxo Grammaticus and the *Histoires Tragiques* of François de Belleforest — these were printed in both the original languages and in translation. For the German edition, the text was the standard translation of Schlegel, adapted and embellished by Gerhardt Hauptmann, who supplied several additional scenes (such as the confrontation of Claudius's emissaries Voltemand and Cornelius with the Norwegian king) to fill in what he conceived to be gaps in the plot, and thereby render the play more "complete" than Shakespeare. Kessler records in his diary for 1927 that Hauptmann had explained to him that the play was not at all as Shakespeare intended:

In his view copyists were responsible for utterly distorting the fourth and fifth acts of the play as originally conceived by Shakespeare. He proceeded to describe to me the alterations he has undertaken. . . . The key-point, he said, is that he makes Hamlet, not Laertes, responsible for the uprising against Claudius. It is Hamlet, not Laertes, who speaks the words, "Oh thou vile king, give to me my father". Hamlet has struck up an alliance with Fortinbras and returns with him to Denmark to avenge his parent and reconquer his inheritance. This is the only way to render the last two acts intelligible and it frees Hamlet from the appearance of being no more than a spineless procrastinator and argumentative dabbler. Goethe came close to appreciating the switch which occurred in the roles of Laertes and Hamlet, but he did not take the point to its logical conclusion. I was much impressed by Hauptmann's arguments and I believe that he may well be right. (1999, 318-20)

On more mature consideration, Kessler stopped short of including Hauptmann's most radical revisions; the fourth and fifth acts are relatively undisturbed, and the German Hamlet remains as spineless a procrastinator as he is in English. (Hauptmann's version of Schlegel itself, however, was not unproblematic: it moves the "To be or not to be" soliloquy to the fifth act). For the English edition, the Shakespearean scholar J. Dover Wilson prepared a more straightforward text based on the second quarto — not, significantly, a conflation of the quarto and Folio, which regularly constituted the "complete" English text in the period.

Craig provided seventy-two woodcuts for the German edition and five additional ones for the English version. The deployment of these on the page resembles more the format of the *Nuremberg Chronicle* than any illustrated scholarly edition of drama: the images are not contained by the typography, but are in full partnership with it, and sometimes seem even in control. Hamlet and Horatio await the ghost, dwarfed by a setting composed of a combination of Craig's woodcut screens, Shakespeare's text, and Saxo's chronicle. Throughout the book, Craig's images are superbly attuned to the play's changes of mood. Several of the woodcuts had to be printed in two stages, to register lighter and darker blacks. For the Play Scene, a cast of commedia dell'arte characters in black silhouette appears in various formats — free-standing across the bottom margin, within whole scenes incised with white on black and gray backgrounds, in a tiny roundel in the centre of a page, and most startling, for the Dumb Show, two elaborately masked and costumed silhouettes replacing the central text on facing pages, with the description of the pantomime printed in red beneath them. Ophelia's last appearance is as a tiny white waiflike form within a grid of pale blue, flanked by two of Craig's massive black woodcut screens, with a silhouetted mob beyond them — this is the only use of color in the woodcuts, and it is tremendously affecting. There is no illustrated Shakespeare in which the images are so thoroughly integrated with the typography, and in which text, book, and performance are conceived so completely as a whole. The Cranach Press *Hamlet* undertakes to rethink the relation of drama, book, and image — in short, the nature of dramatic representation on the page — from the beginning; it reconceives the book of the play as a performance and completes the play as a book.

But of course there can always be more. Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film was gigantic in every way. It ran more than four hours and filled the screen with sumptuously costumed extras, and in addition to including all the dialogue of a conflated text, filled in blanks that even Hauptmann had not noticed. Battles that are merely referred to are staged in full; court scenes seem to be attended by the entire population of a nineteenth-century Lichtenstein. When Polonius instructs Ophelia to return Hamlet's love letters, there are intercut scenes of Hamlet and Ophelia naked in bed making love — it is unclear whether these are flashbacks, or represent Polonius's unfounded fears or Ophelia's unrealised desires: more unanswered questions. During the Player's speech about the rugged Pyrrhus, roles are written in for Priam and Hecuba (cameo appearances by John Gielgud and Judi Dench); we see both Old Norway and Yorick... there can always be more. And of course, there can also always be less: Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*, with Mel Gibson cast as an action hero, wonderfully cut "To be or not to be . . .", the one thing you thought you could be sure of.

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Open Secrets

I begin with some bits of household advice from the sixteenth century. The first group comes from a volume called *A Thousand Notable things, of sundry sortes. Whereof some are wonderfull, some straunge, some pleasant, divers necessary, a great sort profitable and many very precious*, collected by Thomas Lupton, published in London in 1579, and many times thereafter.

The root of peony, which is the herb of the sun, being pulled out of the earth on a Sunday, in the hour of the sun, the sun then being in Leo, called the Lion: and the Moon increasing in light (which is from her change to the full) delivereth them of the falling sickness that bear it upon them. (85-6)

The authority cited is Ficino. Many writers in the period ascribe similar properties to the peony – Joshua Sylvester agrees with Ficino that it cures epilepsy, Sir Thomas Elyot says it purges choler. It is generally claimed to have a calmative effect. What is notable in Lupton’s account, however, are the calendrical and astrological imperatives: these are essential to the herb’s medicinal potency.

Here is another remedy involving the peony:

The professors of natural magic affirm that vervein [vervena] being taken up or gathered when the sun is in Aries, the Ram, and stamped with the seeds of peony, and strained with white wine, and drunk, doth marvelously heal them that have the falling sickness. (84)

Vervena had many uses in early modern pharmacology; as a stiptic, an eye balm, even a snake repellent. Its effectiveness against epilepsy here would seem to derive from its decoction in combination with peony. A crucial element, however, is once again the astrological moment. The authority cited this time is Mizaldus, or Antoine

Mizault, the contemporary French astronomer and physician: “Oftentimes proved, saith Mizaldus”. The combined practice of astronomy and medicine would seem to constitute sufficient authority in such a matter; however, it is not Mizaldus’s practical expertise that is critical here, but his own reliance on prior authority – Lupton’s account concludes, “Which he had out of a very old book of the seven herbs of the planets, written to Hermes”. What is expert about Mizaldus’s testimony to the remedy’s effectiveness, “oftentimes proved”, is the antiquity of his reference book, and its association with the magical name of Hermes Trismegistus.

In Lupton’s remedies, the utility of astrology in the treatment of sickness is exceedingly broad. On the one hand, it determines the critical juncture, from the very moment of gathering the herbs, on which success depends. On the other, it renders all the efforts of skill or magic pointless:

If at the time of the first falling sick of one, or at the time of a question for the sick, if the moon be in the fourth house with Mars, and good planets be cadent, it is sign of death. (86)

This disheartening piece of expertise comes from Johannus Ganivetus’s fifteenth-century *Amicus Medicorum* – friendly advice to the physician, presumably, not even to bother treating the patient.

If astrology offered a universal guide, witchcraft was a universal danger. My next citation comes from the *Secreti d’Alessio*, a very popular handbook of domestic economy by Giralomo Ruscelli, first published in Venice in 1538, and in many subsequent editions; and in English translation in various partial versions starting in 1558 as *The Secrets of Alexis*. A collected edition appeared in 1595; my quotation comes from what is claimed as the first complete English edition, published in London in 1615.

To be assured and safe from all sorcery and enchantment.

Take squilla [a bulb of the onion family], and tie it upon the principal gate or door of your house, and you shall assure all the inhabitants in it from sorcery and enchantments: and this squilla assureth and keepeth all plants and trees that are about the house where it is planted or set from all noisomeness and infection of the air. (145r)

An all-purpose prophylactic, to be sure, rather like what is claimed for *feng shui* now. Still, *feng shui* is said to require a certain expertise. What is striking about Alexis's secret is how simple it is to keep oneself safe from the universal threat of witchcraft. On the other hand, in case the preventative fails, or has not been installed in time, Lupton's *Thousand Notable Things* has a remedy for the effects of sorcery.

If one be bewitched of any, put quicksilver into a quill and stop it, or else into a hollow nutshell enclosed fast with wax, and lay the same under the pillow of the party bewitched, or under the threshold of the door where he enters the house or chamber. (163)

An early owner of my copy of the book found this item especially useful, glossing it "To put away witcheries", and marking it "Nota", suggesting that the effects of witchcraft were a constant problem.

The reason I am starting with these recipes is to indicate the utter commonplaceness of magic in the period. This is a point that has been made exhaustively by Keith Thomas in his magisterial, essential, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; but I want here to offer some qualifications to Thomas's account, and to examine some of its implications that cast a number of familiar literary texts in an unfamiliar light. To begin with, it is important to note that none of my examples support Thomas's general contention that magic always worked in tandem with a good deal of religious apparatus – that in gathering the herbs one made the sign of the cross, or recited the Paternoster or the Ave Maria, or that the practitioner hung an amulet with prayers or Christian symbols (or with these backward or in anagrams) around the patient's neck; and that this was the essential element in the supposed potency of the cure. Thomas claims, for example, that vervein had to be crossed and blessed when it was gathered; but as we have seen, this is not the case in Lupton's pharmacopeia. What is most striking, in fact, about both my early modern compilations is how overwhelmingly secular a system they imply – this despite the fact that Lupton even includes a number of ways of determining whether somebody is possessed with devils: dealing with this issue does not even involve making the sign of the cross to protect oneself. *Secrets of Alexis*, to

be sure, in a preface makes much of the omnipotence of God and the necessity of faith; but thereafter God and faith do not figure at all in the operation of the protections and cures. And Lupton's *Thousand Notable Things* does not make so much as a gesture toward the idea that its cures are faith-based: even in its dedication and introduction it presents itself as operating completely within the world of natural forces. A few times Lupton asserts the operation of God's providence in human affairs, but always as a way of affirming the truth of predictive astrology and the folly of trying to avoid the fate determined through it – prayer is recommended only as a means of reconciling oneself to one's horoscope.

The magical practice Keith Thomas describes also depends heavily on specialists – village wizards, cunning women, parallels and antitypes to priests or ministers on the one hand, who promised little, and the dubiously effective physicians on the other, who were, in any case, extremely scarce. Once again, Ruscelli and Lupton present quite a different picture. No specially endowed practitioner is required; the expertise involves no mystical component, whether religious or occult; and perhaps most striking, the magical power, the secret knowledge, is transmitted simply by reading a commercially available book. To judge from the volumes' printing history and from individual copies, moreover, the claim was not an idle one. My copy of Lupton is heavily annotated throughout by a contemporary owner, with remedies he or she found particularly effective signalled (as the antidote to sorcery, cited above, is) with a marginal "Nota", or a pointing hand, and occasionally with some addition to the recipe – the book clearly got a great deal of use. And it continued to do so: it was reprinted numerous times throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with three editions in the 1790s, and one published in Manchester as late as 1800. Ruscelli was translated into every European language; seventy-nine editions are known.

Part of the explanation for Ruscelli's and Lupton's effectiveness, of course, must lie in the difficulty of determining what constitutes a cure for the myriad ailments these works address. The remedy for the bewitched depends on being able to decide what constitutes being bewitched – no examples are offered. An extremely elaborate cure for headaches involves making a complex plaster and applying it to the sufferer for nine consecutive nights – the entry concludes,

“This medicine never fails” (166), and a marginal “Nota” presumably indicates the owner-sufferer’s satisfaction even with so long a course of treatment. Similarly, an earache cure takes nine nights, and is declared “proved” (228) – the mystical number nine is doubtless significant, though both cures are said sometimes to work sooner. Toothache cures, on the other hand, of which there are many, are all said to be immediate, which suggests a certain ambiguity in the concept of pain relief.

Magic in these compilations is about getting through ordinary life: keeping the house secure, knowing what to expect, doing something to make the distress of everyday existence more bearable. There are also, of course, much grander claims for magic in the period: the miraculous transformations of the enchanters in Ariosto, Tasso and Spenser, Prospero’s power over the elements, John Dee’s conversations with angels, Paracelsus’s ability to produce life itself. But even stories like these have their mundane subtexts. The search for the philosopher’s stone, for all its recondite implications about the unity of matter and its promise of the development of particle physics, is basically a search for a steady source of income; the fabled erotic sorcery of the multitude of Circe figures, Alcina, Armida, Acrasia, has in view not true love, but merely a steady supply of compliant sexual objects, and the outcome, even in the world of poetic romance, is generally unsatisfactory. This, however, is the view from outside; the practitioners, no matter how modest their successes, are always believers. John Dee was unable to understand a word his angelic messengers told him, but this had no effect on his faith in his art. Even in our sceptical age Stephen Greenblatt’s similarly audacious project of speaking with the dead has eventuated only in a series of books on Shakespeare – which doubtless, for the author at least, have been validation enough.

Magic is always a disappointment, and always irresistible. In an essay on Marlowe called “Tobacco and Boys” (Orgel 2002, 211-30) I observed that for all its admonitory aspects, *Doctor Faustus* would have functioned much more as a temptation than as a warning. Every audience, every reader, of this immensely popular morality play has felt that Faustus isn’t ambitious enough, doesn’t ask for the right things, doesn’t really know what to ask for; that the play is under-imagined, and that any of us could do better, make the

pact with the devil and get more out of it – or even get away with it, repent at the last minute. My colleague David Riggs, having resisted this claim of mine for many years, in his biography of Marlowe finally concurred: he observes of Faustus that “instead of scaring people away from magic, he drew them in”, and cites the wonderful case of a medical student in Tübingen who used incantations from Johann Spies’s *Faustbuch*, published in 1587 and Marlowe’s immediate source, in an attempt to make a pact with the devil to pay off his debts (Riggs 2004, 235). The mundane aspects of this dangerous transaction are especially striking. Or they ought to be; however the only real danger in such cases came not from any diabolical visitors, but from the ecclesiastical authorities, since sorcerers like the impecunious medical student were bound to discover that the devil did not come when you called him, and it was only a small step beyond that to concluding that he did not exist at all. The Faust story, when used in this way, was more likely to produce atheists than believers.

Nevertheless, considering the perilous quality of early modern life, Faustus’s fantastic bargain is not an unattractive one. It is not about the promise of riches and power (which produce intoxicating fantasies in the play, but are really incidental); what it offers is control over one’s own destiny for twenty-four years. Even for people with less hazardous careers than Marlowe’s, the gamble – Pascal’s wager in reverse – might have seemed well worth taking. If Marlowe had made Faustus’s deal he would have lived another twenty-four years, and died in 1617, the year after Shakespeare. Consider the life expectancy in this period: if you were male and made it past adolescence without succumbing to childhood diseases, plague, and the multitude of perils incident to everyday living, you had a chance of reaching a reasonable age, which in the early seventeenth century was not the threescore and ten stipulated by the Word of God but anything over forty-five – Marlowe would have died at 53, a year older than Shakespeare. Obviously it would have helped a lot if you could make a deal with the devil; it was clear you could not make one with God.

Faustus’s ambitions are a good index to how far the promise of magic extended. Marlowe starts with a fantasy of unlimited desire and unlimited power to satisfy it. When Faustus summons

Mephistophilis, he articulates a megalomaniac dream: to live in all voluptuousness, to be the emperor of the world, to control nature and the supernatural. This is what the diabolical deal promises him. But four scenes later, when his bad angel urges him to think on the wealth he can have, his eager reply is “The seignory of Emden shall be mine!” (A 2.1.23)¹ – Emden is a rich commercial port; the dream is already a good deal less ambitious than ruling the world, and he hasn’t even signed the bond yet. By the end of the same scene his voluptuousness has diminished significantly too: “. . . let me have a wife, the fairest maid in Germany, for I am wanton and lascivious, and cannot live without a wife” (143-5). But Mephistophilis will not supply a wife – marriage is a sacrament. He instead proposes to bring Faustus the fairest courtesans in the world to sleep with. For a truly wanton and lascivious voluptuary this sounds like a much more attractive proposition than marriage, but Faustus doesn’t even comment on it, and Mephistophilis effortlessly moves him on to what it turns out he really wants, books. The books are books of incantations, astronomy and natural history: universal power is epitomised in the written word – the power is literacy; the pact with the devil is an allegory of Marlowe’s own humanistic education, the search for the right books, Aristotle, Pliny, Hermes Trismegistus – or, for the less ambitious and educated, *The Secrets of Alexis, A Thousand Notable Things*.

If magic is power, what do you do with power in Marlowe’s world? Faustus’s initial instincts are altruistic. A good deal of the play’s appeal is to English anti-Catholic sentiments. All the horseplay with the Pope is the other side of the ambition to build a wall of brass around Protestant Germany. The real English fear of the danger of Catholic power is disarmed by magic’s ability to make fools of its audience. Faustus is, for a little while, a version of the Protestant hero. But where do the real ambitions lie? At the play’s center, after all, is a confrontation with Catholic power itself in the person of the Holy Roman Emperor. The visit to Charles V ought to be a triumphant entry: Faustus has humiliated the Pope; he is more powerful than any earthly monarch. Why is this not a scene of two

¹ Quotations are from the parallel texts in Marlowe 1950. In citations, A is the 1604 text, B the 1616 text.

emperors, either paying homage to each other or threatening each other? But Faustus appears instead as an entertainer, “The wonder of the world for magic art” (B 4.1.11), and from the sorcery materialises not a promise of infinite power but simply the phantom figures of Alexander the Great and his paramour – Marlowe’s heroic drama reduced to a miniature pantomime.

Underlying all this is a striking sense of the limits of fantasy, of what, we might say, magic really can be expected to accomplish. Faustus comes to Charles V as John Dee came to the emperor of Hungary, not in triumph but as a petitioner, a supplicant. What he seeks is what Dee sought, a job in the Emperor’s service – the dream of glory and power is finally only an upwardly mobile middle class Elizabethan dream: Spenser’s dream of a good civil service job or a place at court, Jonson’s dream of the Mastership of the Revels, Donne’s dream of a secretaryship to somebody, anybody, rich and important; not even Sidney’s dream of political influence and independence.

Here then is the progression of fantasies: imperial power is almost immediately abandoned for money, and not even for what we would call “real money”, all the gold in the New World or the riches of Asia, but something much more modest and localised, the commercial revenues of Emden. Women get short-circuited as soon as it turns out marriage is impossible – if marriage is impossible, so is sex: Faustus turns out to have the most conventional middle-class morals. There is no megalomaniac fantasy in this magic, nothing irregular or transgressive, not even Marlowe’s interest in boys. The desire for books certainly shouldn’t be a problem, but this too doesn’t satisfy him; obviously there has to be more to life than books. So the play starts over again, with less material ambitions: he wants to fly, to go to Rome, to be invisible, to humiliate the Pope. And then he wants, not to be emperor, but to *impress* the emperor, to get secure employment, to be noticed, successful, admired – by the middle of the play, at the point where, after all, Faustus is at the height of his powers, this is what magic can do for you: on the one hand not a great deal, but on the other hand (to be realistic), everything you could reasonably ask for.

It also, however, puts you in mortal danger, not for your soul but for your life. The greatest danger is not damnation, it is human envy,

the other upwardly mobile young men who are your competitors and resent your success. Running parallel with the dream of success, therefore, is necessarily a dream of invulnerability: the magic that damns you is also the only thing that can save you. You literally cannot live without it. If it gets you damned, it nevertheless preserves you until you get there. But does it even necessarily lead to damnation? Faustus's friends Valdes and Cornelius, experienced conjurers who train him in the art, seem in no danger from the infernal powers. Is Faustus damned because he is the play's only believer?

Of course the essential point about Faustus's magic is that it is not really Faustus's. It depends on having Mephistophilis as his servant; and one way of accounting for the intense attractions of magic in early modern society is probably as the ultimate image of the servant class under complete control. This is certainly what magic is for Prospero in *The Tempest*: the storms and apparitions and spectacular transformations through which Shakespeare's magician brings his designs to fruition are, properly speaking, the work of his servant Ariel, acting on his master's orders. What Prospero has is not magical power, but education, the liberal arts (literally, arts appropriate to a free man or gentleman); in short, the knowledge of how to keep Ariel and his army of spirits in servitude. It is a knowledge that works much less successfully on Prospero's other servant Caliban, no doubt because he deals with the more prosaic daily tasks of providing food, keeping the fire going, and washing up. Even magic has trouble getting this sort of work done – what any householder would recognise as “real” work. Jonson brilliantly deconstructs the assumptions behind such magical fantasies in *The Alchemist*, when the servants, left to their own devices, set themselves up precisely as magicians, and are implicitly believed, and duly con the neighbourhood.

It is not accidental that the only thing Jonson's alchemists actually produce is a rich widow for the returning master to marry: the area of life in which claims of magic are most routinely invoked is love. “I must from this enchanting queen break off” (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, 1.2.127) – Anthony's construction implies no actual sorcery on Cleopatra's part, but only that enchantment is the natural condition of erotic relationships, at least of those outside of marriage. For Pompey, however, it is precisely Cleopatra's magic that can be counted on to keep Anthony out of the way:

. . . all the charms of love,
 Salt Cleopatra, soften thy waned lip!
 Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both!
 Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
 Keep his brain fuming.
 (2.1.20-4)

The operation of witchcraft in love is here clearly a reciprocal matter, with Anthony's lust the critical third term. As for breaking love's fetters, the antidotes to love are few, and tend to be ineffective. It is probably significant that in love plots, it is almost always the woman whose magic is operative – Cleopatra is clearly as captivated by Anthony as he is by her, but nobody proposes that she break his spell and get back to the business of ruling Egypt. Among male lovers, Othello is quite unusual in claiming to be in possession of some love magic himself, the “magic in the web” of the handkerchief that would – or as it turns out would not – bind him to his love (significantly, not bind her to him) forever. Spenser's enchanter Busirane, like Milton's Comus, can torture the objects of his passion, but seduction is beyond the power of masculine witchcraft. The Don Juans of the early modern world operate not with charms, but with charm, and testosterone, and they have, in addition, a great many very eager women to work with.

When love is literally represented as enchantment, the magic is generally treated allegorically or symbolically – as, for example, in the case of Isolde's love potion. Would she and Tristan not be in love without it? Why, indeed, is it there at all? If we take it literally, does it not cast doubt on the reality of the love, suggest that it is not “true” love? The case appears even more obvious in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the juice of Oberon's “little western flower” produces instant infatuation with absolutely anyone, “the next live creature that it sees” (2.1.166, 172). But here the anti-literalist argument seems misguided. Both these plots imply that love can indeed be induced by magic, and that the love so induced is no less love than the love that arrives unassisted. Both are a part of nature; love itself is a kind of witchcraft. The case seems, oddly, especially clear in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, despite the obvious triviality of the love plot: Puck's misapplication of the magical juice does

certainly put the wrong Athenian lovers together; but as we see at the play's opening, Demetrius has already transferred his affections from the right girl, Helena, to the wrong one, Hermia, who loves Lysander. Moreover, Titania has in the past been Theseus's lover, and Oberon has been Hippolyta's. With or without the magic flower, people change their affections, break their vows, fall in love with the wrong people or with people who do not love them. Titania's compelled passion for Bottom is only an extreme example of the normal situation. There is no difference whatever between the love induced by Isolde's potion and real love, just as there is no implication that when Demetrius is finally, through another application of the magic juice, induced to return to his first love Helena, this does not constitute a happy ending. Questions like what would have happened if Isolde had been given the potion on behalf of King Mark, the original plan, instead of sharing it with Tristan, are not exactly beside the point; they simply indicate the difference between tragedy and comedy, and the possibility of either as the culmination of any love plot.

There are no love potions in *Secrets of Alexis or A Thousand Notable Things*, though both books imply a relationship between men and women that would certainly render such a nostrum credible, especially given what constitutes evidence of success in, say, toothache and earache cures. A number of the recipes do relate to the problems of love, however. Remedies are given for impotence, including the impotence caused by witchcraft, a sufficiently attested condition to qualify as one of the very few legally acceptable grounds for divorce – in, for example, the notorious case of the Earl and Countess of Essex in 1613. Lupton's prescription is surprisingly simple: "If a married man be let or hindered through enchantment, sorcery or witchcraft from the act of generation, let him make water through his marriage ring, and he shall be loosed from the same. . . ." (Lupton 1579, 20) – my contemporary reader considers this useful enough to gloss it "to stay witchcraft". For the most part, however, Ruscelli and Lupton concern themselves with sexual failure as a general failure of the loins, whether from a lack of energy or from kidney problems. Ruscelli's remedy, a surprisingly simple one, is parsnips boiled with sugar, honey and various spices, and is said to produce "a marvelous effect" (336v).

Lupton has recipes for both assuaging and inducing lust, among them the following curious double-acting powder:

If the piss of a bull that is all red be made in powder, and a dram thereof. . . be given to a woman in a draught of wine, it will make her loath to have to do with a man. . . . And the same powder given in meet medicines to a man, doth contrary stir and make him have lust therein. (19)

The puzzling practical applications of this potion are probably less its point than the evidence it provides that women and men are opposites, and function by contraries. A significant number of the recipes in both books are concerned specifically with controlling women's appetites, sometimes, as in this one from Ruscelli, apparently quite pointlessly:

To make that a woman shall eat of nothing that is set upon the table.
Take a little green basil, and when men bring the dishes to the table, put it underneath them, that the woman perceive it not: for men say that she will eat of none of that which is in the dish whereunder the basil lieth. (131r)

Men here are completely in control, not only bringing the food but giving the essential testimony to the effectiveness of the trick, the only purpose of which appears to be precisely to demonstrate control. Given the emphasis on control throughout both books, it is especially interesting how few of the remedies address the affective life. There are cures for melancholy, to be sure, but none to make a woman love you, or to keep your wife faithful, or to keep your husband from straying – none even to ensure that when you take any of the various lust-inducing potions the object of your passion will be receptive. These are very unromantic handbooks, concerned not with wish fulfillment, and certainly not with the art of the possible, but, within the social and cultural norms, with the art of the conceivable.

Even theatrical magic, as we have seen, had its mundane subtexts; but for the spectacular effects of sorcery one certainly went to theatre. Love magic, indeed, figured prominently in attacks on the stage, which was regularly compared to Circe in its allure and danger. The fictions of playwrights, Stephen Gosson warned

his readers in *The School of Abuse*, were the cups of Circe (Gosson 1579, A2v). The magical power of Renaissance theatre, its ability not merely to compel wonder in its audiences but to change them, whether for good or evil, by persuasion or seduction, is assumed by both attackers and defenders of the art, and Gosson's warning fully acknowledges both the danger of the stage and its irresistible attractiveness. When Prospero, near the end of *The Tempest*, renounces his magic with a speech adapted almost verbatim from Ovid's *Medea*, the evocation of witchcraft through the classic exemplar of a dangerously beautiful woman encapsulates the full range of Renaissance attitudes to the theatrical magician's powers. For John Rainoldes, "men are made adulterers and enemies of all chastity by coming to such plays" (Rainoldes 1599, 18) and Philip Stubbes notoriously particularised the erotic danger of theatre:

Then these goodly pageants being ended, every mate sorts to his mate, every one brings another homeward of their way very friendly, and in their secret conclaves covertly they play the sodomites, or worse. (Stubbes 1583, 204)

If the vice worse than sodomy has no name, it is clear that for such observers there was no erotic possibility, not even the nameless ones, that theatre did not encompass and promote. Perhaps this is why love potions were unnecessary, at least when the actors came to town.

Most magic plays, however, are in fact not concerned with love, but with power, subversion, mischief; above all, with the evocation of wonder. The wonder for the most part depended more on the imaginative complicity of the spectators than on the ingenuity of the performers – Philip Henslowe's theatrical properties included "a robe for to goo invisibell" (Henslowe 1961, 325) that was obviously quite visible – but mysterious visions, ascents and descents, flying machines and transformation devices had been staples of theatre almost from the beginning, and only the most naïve would have been unaware that the magic in these was mechanics and sleight of hand. Nevertheless, the involvement of theatre with diabolical sorcery – the assumption that it was real and dangerous magic – was a staple of antitheatrical polemics. The fact is exemplified by a group of stories about *Doctor Faustus*. In one version, during a

performance in Exeter, as Faustus was conjuring surrounded by a group of devils, the actors became aware that there was one devil too many, and stopped the play and fled from the town in fear for their lives and souls. In other less stylish versions of the story, Satan himself actually appeared during a performance. Such stories are part of the mythology of anti-theatricalism, intended to demonstrate how inherently profane and dangerous an amusement theatre is; but they also indicate the extent to which theatre was acknowledged to be in touch with an aspect of reality that was beyond rational control. They are stories that construe theatre as magic, with *Doctor Faustus* as the paradigmatic instance.

By the early seventeenth century, doubtless largely in response to the new king's interests, witchcraft and the diabolical were especially good theatre business. The magic plays that seem to have been prompted by *Macbeth* – a play about James's ancestry in which James himself is summoned up in a vision – give a good sense of what was commercially viable in theatrical magic at this time: Barnabe Barnes's *The Devil's Charter* was at the Globe in the same season as *Macbeth*, 1606, and John Marston's *The Wonder of Women*, with its sorcery scenes, was at the Blackfriars. Ben Jonson's antimasque of witches in *The Masque of Queens*, performed at court in 1609, inaugurated a decade of sorcery plays and masques, including *The Tempest*, *The Alchemist*, *The Witch*, *The Witch of Edmonton*, *The Devil is an Ass*, and the revived and revised *Doctor Faustus*. What was most attractive on the stage, evidently, was diabolical magic: only *The Tempest* and *The Alchemist* present secular magicians.

I have written about the intimate connection in King James's mind between kingship and witchcraft. Here I am summarising material discussed in my book *Imagining Shakespeare*, in connection with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The king was convinced that from his earliest childhood a systematic conspiracy of witches directed by the devil had been at work against him. He attended witch trials, and conducted interrogations of the accused himself whenever possible. The outcomes, not surprisingly, always confirmed his belief. He made himself an expert on witchcraft, and when he came to the English throne, the two works he published to introduce himself to his new subjects were the *Basilicon Doron*, his philosophy of kingship, and his dialogue *Daemonology*, a treatise

on witchcraft. He is what might be called sceptically credulous: though he found the practice of witchcraft widespread, he argued that those who thought themselves witches were deceived. Their mischief and marvels were the work not of their spells, but of the devil, a means of persuading them to give him their souls – this is essentially Marlowe’s version of sorcery in *Doctor Faustus*.

English readers had already learned of the king’s involvement in the subject through a pamphlet called *Newes From Scotland*, published in 1592. Three cases of witchcraft are described, all highly theatrical. In one, a servant girl is found to possess miraculous healing powers. Though the magic seems entirely benign, her master fears her abilities are unlawful, and under torture she confesses to being a witch, and to prove the point performs a witches’ dance for the investigators, “playing. . . upon a small trump”. (One of the most striking aspects of all these cases is the insistence of the defendants on demonstrating their guilt). The case was duly reported to King James:

These confessions made the king in a wonderful admiration, and sent for the said Geillis Duncane, who upon the like trump did play the said dance before the king’s majesty, who in respect of the strangeness of these matters, took great delight. . . . (James I 1924, 14)²

The association of witchcraft with theatre is all but explicit here.

Here is the second case: the witch Agnis Tompson claimed that she had been commanded by the devil to kill the king and had raised the storms that had prevented James’s bride Anne of Denmark from coming to Scotland. Tompson’s schemes had failed only because of the king’s invincible faith. Figure 1 is the illustration that accompanies the account of this case: at the left, the devil dictates instructions for a group of witches to a scribe; the two incapacitated gentlemen at the lower and middle right have been bewitched; above right, the witches stir a cauldron, which causes the sinking of the ship at the upper left. The king was an active participant in this trial: the witch, faced with the royal skepticism, whispered to the king the secrets of his wedding night, and he authenticated her testimony. Like Henry VIII insisting on his own cuckoldry, James became the witness to the vitiation of his marriage. James’s

² Quotations from this text are modernised.



Fig. 1: Witchcraft in action. *Newes from Scotland*, 1592

fascination with witchcraft is obviously related to his general distrust of women, and his very public attachment to young men – the domestication, in his psychic drama, of Oberon’s compulsive pursuit, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, of the lovely Indian boy.

The third, and most theatrical, case concerns a schoolmaster named John Cunningham, also called Dr. Fian, under which name he was “a notable sorcerer”. Cunningham took a fancy to a girl who, however, rejected his advances. He undertook to make her love him through sorcery, and persuaded her brother to “obtain for him three hairs of his sister’s privities”. But as the boy was attempting to fulfill his promise on the sleeping girl, she awoke. The scheme was revealed to their mother, who was a witch herself, and she substituted for her daughter’s hair three hairs from the udder of a young cow. These were brought to the sorcerer, who then “wrought his art upon them,” and immediately



Fig. 2: Dr Fian and the devil. *Newes from Scotland*, 1592

the cow whose hairs they were indeed came unto the door of the church wherein the schoolmaster was, . . . and made towards the schoolmaster, leaping and dancing upon him, and following him forth of the church and to what place soever he went, to the great admiration of all the townsmen. . . . (James I 1924: 21-3)

In the illustration in Figure 2, Fian conjures with a magic circle above, and is approached by the cow; below he rides behind the devil on a black horse. The trope of Oberon's little western flower is domesticated, naturalised, and explicitly sexualised here – the magic of irresistible erotic attraction now lies in the female “privities”. But except for the reversal of the sexes, the fantasy remains that of Oberon, Titania and Bottom: the witch mother punishes the lascivious Fian by inventing a preposterous love affair with an animal, and the spectacle of the bestial romance provides the town with a piece of popular theatre paralleling the courtly love of the Fairy Queen and an ass.

The perennial question of what kind of magic Prospero practices – black or white, neoplatonic philosophy, Baconian science – is misguided. The model for what he practices is theatre. His resources and repertoire include a troupe of actors, flying machines, thunder and lightning, disappearing banquets, mysterious music, ascents and descents, a masque of goddesses, even a closet full of costumes, the glittering apparel that proves so fatally attractive to Stephano and Trinculo. Prospero the magician has been, historically, one of Shakespeare's most compelling creations, a figure who, like Hamlet and Falstaff, seems to have a life outside the confines of his play. The play itself prompts this, as Prospero, in his epilogue, entreats us to send him back to Italy through the help of our applause so that he may continue his story without us. Through his agency we have become the magicians, and the crucial act of magic is to bring the play to a successful conclusion. Since the early nineteenth century, when Edmond Malone declared *The Tempest* to be Shakespeare's last play, our applause has also brought Shakespeare's career to an end, and thereby turned Prospero into a piece of Shakespearean autobiography, the playwright's farewell to the stage, with Prospero's magic an allegory for the playwright's craft, Shakespeare's summary of and commentary on his theatrical career.

But magic in *The Tempest* is a profoundly ambivalent art. If it is empiricism, knowledge, science, the liberal arts, it is also dangerously narcissistic – Prospero himself blames his philosophical pursuits for his dereliction of duty as a ruler. In this view, magic is not a source of power but a retreat from it; and the return to Milan and the reassumption of his dukedom require the renunciation of the art. The darkest view of magic is also to be found in the play, in the figure of Sycorax, that ghostly memory of Ariel's recounted to Prospero, which remains so intensely present in Prospero's mind, so vividly summoned up in his rage against Caliban and Antonio, the perverse, irrational, violent, malicious, vindictive principle in nature, progenitor of monsters, lover and agent of the devil on earth. The theatrical is also the anti-theatrical; illusion is both pleasure and deception, delight and danger; the masque, the culminating display of the magician at the height of his powers, is also merely "some vanity of mine art" (4.1.41). But in fact the drowning of the book and the breaking of the staff at the play's end do not consign

Prospero and us to a world without magic. They return us to the world of *A Thousand Notable Things* and *Secrets of Alexis*, in which magic is everywhere, and everyone practices it.

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“Go To You Are a Woman”

1.

Mistress Quickly’s response to Falstaff’s dismissive epithet is indignant: “Who, I? No; I defy thee! God’s light, I was never called so in mine own house before!” (*Henry IV, Part 1*, 3.3.61-3). What, indeed, is a woman in Shakespeare? For about fifteen years in my undergraduate Shakespeare course I had a little theatre game designed to illustrate the nature of an all-male stage, to get students thinking about gender not as essentialised but as a matter of performance and behaviour and cultural assumptions. We would take a couple of bits of *As You Like It*, with Rosalind talking to Orlando first as a woman and then as a boy, and try out various ways of doing it – if you are a woman, what constitutes acting male? If you are a man, what constitutes acting female? Predictably the young women in the class were more willing to play the game than the young men, and that in itself was instructive about cultural gender assumptions (I can recall only one male student who agreed to do it). But sometime around 2000 the game became more embarrassing than enlightening, and I abandoned it.

I turned to videos, which generally allowed me to get the point across less directly but vividly enough. In the BBC *As You Like It*, Helen Mirren’s Rosalind playing Ganymede not only does not act masculine, she goes to some lengths to keep it clear that she is a woman – the costume lets you see that she has breasts, and she even wears eye makeup – and in the 1937 film with Laurence Olivier and Elizabeth Bergner, Bergner in drag wears lipstick. These are strategies designed to insist on the women’s glamor even in drag, and also probably to save Orlando from any suspicion of a homoerotic interest in the youth, though the name Ganymede

has gay pederasty written all over it – the measure of Rosalind’s attractiveness, in this all male theatre, is her analogy to the divine catamite. Shakespeare adopted the name from his source Thomas Lodge’s *Rosalynde*; Rosalind and Ganymede are the only names he chose not to change. The sexual overtone would have disappeared if Shakespeare’s Rosalind had adopted the name Cesario, like the cross-dressed Viola in *Twelfth Night*, or Fidele, like the cross-dressed Imogen in *Cymbeline*.

There is nothing in the script that suggests any erotic interest in Ganymede on Orlando’s part, though the name Ganymede is certainly at least a license to flirt; but whether the scenes are erotic or not is going to be all in the performance. So is whether they are convincing or not – modern productions usually work hard to make sure they are not convincing, to make sure you are always aware of Ganymede as “really” a woman, and of Orlando as not at all attracted to young men. One striking exception is Christine Edzard’s superb British production of 1992, available on video, which has the Rosalind, Emma Croft, play Ganymede as a cheeky, utterly captivating twelve-year-old boy, not at all seductive, but a kind of ideal kid brother – and here the scenes are delightful, unforced, and utterly convincing: Orlando’s pleasure in the boy’s company is manifest, though not at all erotic. The down-side of this way of playing the role is that the very attractive Rosalind becomes a not especially attractive Ganymede. In contrast, I recall an all male National Theatre production in the 1960s, in which Ronald Pickup as Rosalind and Jeremy Brett as Orlando projected a touching and clearly erotic adolescent longing in the wooing scenes.

My students sometimes ask me whether Orlando *really* thinks he’s talking to a boy, as if a convincing impersonation were simply unimaginable. My response, that on Shakespeare’s stage he really was talking to a boy, only emphasises how genuinely difficult the assumptions of Shakespeare’s stage are to take for granted: that youths and young women, in all but the most intimate encounters (sexual, excretory), really can become interchangeable and indistinguishable – everything depends on the behaviour and the clothing. The examples in my theatre game are, of course, the Elizabethan situation in reverse, with women playing men. As for men playing women, Mark Rylance in drag played a hugely

successful Olivia in *Twelfth Night* at the London Globe in 2013. This was highly praised for its supposed authenticity, but it obviously had absolutely nothing to do with Elizabethan boy actors. When Samuel Pepys went to theatre in 1660 to see Edward Kynaston, the last of the transvestite boys, he described him as “the prettiest lady that ever I saw” (1974, 1.224) – Kynaston was a really good actor who understood the gender codes (he played male roles too). Mark Rylance is certainly a really good actor; he played Olivia, however, not as a pretty lady, but as exactly what he was, a fifty-year-old female impersonator.

There is an element in Shakespeare’s text that is really not recoverable on the post-Shakespearean stage, and that has to do with both cultural attitudes toward sexuality and with the conditions of Shakespeare’s theatre. Shakespeare’s women were prepubescent boys. In Shakespeare’s source, Arthur Brooke’s *Romeus and Juliet*, Juliet is sixteen; Shakespeare reduces her age to thirteen, even insists on it (the Nurse recalls the date of her birth). This may be a nice metatheatrical touch reflecting the age of the boy playing the role, but it is also culturally significant in that Juliet has only just passed the age of consent, which in Elizabethan England (and until the eighteenth century) was twelve for women, fourteen for men. The age of consent is the age at which individuals can enter into a legally binding contract, in this case the contract of marriage; that is, the age at which children no longer require parental consent to marry, the age at which they may legally elope. If this seems to us unreasonably young, Paris, pressing his case as a prospective son-in-law, even claims to Juliet’s father that “Younger than she are happy mothers made” (1.2.12). It is surely not the case that there were many twelve-year-old mothers in England – Paris may only be mirroring the Elizabethan envy of supposed Italian sexual precociousness – but in Shakespeare’s Verona Paris cannot be far off the mark: Juliet’s mother declares that she herself was fourteen when Juliet was born. And Romeo is in the throes of first love, with Rosaline and then with Juliet. For Elizabethans he would have been fifteen, the age at which, according to Renaissance physiology, males become sexually active.

The play, then, for Shakespeare’s audience, was about a thirteen-year-old girl eloping with a fifteen-year-old boy – the

romance of young love included a great deal to disturb audiences of parents with marriageable children in this patriarchal society. We inevitably miss this when the roles are played by mature, sexually secure, adults – in the 1936 film, Leslie Howard’s forty-year-old Romeo and Norma Shearer’s thirty-six-year-old Juliet did not seem preposterous only because the play was a classic and these were famous and glamorous stars; the play was not a play, it was a “vehicle”, and all references to Juliet’s age were removed. Two centuries earlier Theophilus Cibber’s Romeo had as his Juliet his own fifteen-year-old daughter – her age was close enough, but Romeo was literally old enough to be her father. Garrick was a mature thirty-three when in 1750 he reluctantly first played Romeo; his Juliet, the Irish actress George Anne Bellamy, was twenty-three. The Baz Luhrman film with a teenage Claire Danes and Leonardo di Caprio did capture some of the youthful transgressiveness of the original; and Zeffirelli’s Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting inhabited their roles beautifully, though there were long stretches of Juliet’s part that were cut, presumably because they could not be played convincingly by a modern sixteen-year-old, to say nothing of a modern thirteen-year-old. How effective the play can be when Juliet is played as (though not by) a thirteen-year-old is discussed in my essay “Shakespeare all’italiana” (see below), which includes an account of an Italian production of *Romeo e Giulietta*, with the Giulietta played as a thirteen-year-old. I am quoting myself: “The role, played in this way, made superb sense, and passages that in anglophone productions are commonly cut or truncated, such as Juliet’s potion speech, worked beautifully here: the hyperbolic fears were the imagination of innocence and inexperience, and the melodramatic rhetoric came naturally from a thirteen year old – for once in this scene, nobody laughed”.

The modern version of *Romeo and Juliet* is based on two different quarto texts, a “bad” one published in 1597 and the more satisfactory one of 1599. For a long time the differences between Q1 and Q2, and the presumed defectiveness of Q1, were explained by invoking the concept of memorial reconstruction: Q1 was claimed to be a text put together by actors with deficient memories. But over the years the arguments postulating memorial reconstruction in Q1 looked increasingly tenuous, and they have now been effectively

demolished by Paul Werstine and Lukas Erne, though both retain them to account for small individual moments.¹ Here is Erne’s concluding summary of his argument about the relation of the two texts, which seems to me by far the best proposal, an elegant account of a very complex situation: “Shakespeare’s original script as reflected by Q2 seems likely to have been abridged before the play reached the stage, but this abridgment accounts only for a portion of the divergences between Q1 and Q2, the omissions, but not the textual differences. While the latter seem partly a matter of memorial agency, it seems possible that small-scale authorial revision also contributed a share towards them” (Shakespeare 2007, 24). In this account, the text of Q2 is prior to that of Q1, which is both an abridgment and a revision. This argument seems to me in general right; but there are some interesting cases that it does not account for. It seems to me that each text is at some points the prior one, a revision of the other, and neither represents what Elizabethan audiences saw on stage: the book is not the play.²

Let us consider Romeo’s two loves Rosaline and Juliet, and attitudes toward women expressed in Mercutio’s Queen Mab speech. Romeo is established at his first entrance as a passionate but thoroughly conventional lover, worshipping an unobtainable beloved. There are, however, some curious things – curious because if Q1 is a cut text, it is also a revised one, and things one would expect to be revised are left alone. For example, Benvolio has claimed, both to Romeo’s father and again to Romeo, that he does not know what is ailing his friend, and he now extracts the information that Romeo is in love. Benvolio asks with whom, and Romeo goes through an extended paean to his beloved’s chaste unobtainability, but pointedly refuses to name her. Nevertheless when in the next scene the list of invitees to the Capulet party is produced, Benvolio seeing Rosaline’s name on the list knows at once that she is the woman in question. To make sense of this, you have to invent a continuation of their conversation while they are offstage at the beginning of

1 Werstine 1999, 326-7 and 332-3, and Shakespeare 2007.

2 For the full argument, see my essay “Two Household Friends: The Plausibility of *Romeo and Juliet* Q1”, in Orgel 2022, 65-82, from which this section of the present essay has been adapted.

scene 2, during which Benvolio extracts Rosaline's name. This quite changes the dynamic between Benvolio and Romeo; it also gives us a sense that there is a lot going on in the play that we are not being told. Is that deliberate? Or shall we simply say that this all goes by so quickly in the theatre that we do not notice it – that the book is not the play? (Of course, most of what editors trouble themselves about is unnoticeable in the theatre).

Let us pause over the list of guests invited to the ball

Signor Martino and his wife and daughters;
 County Anselme and his beauteous sisters;
 The lady widow of Vitruvio;
 Signor Placentio and his lovely nieces;
 Mercutio and his brother Valentine;
 Mine uncle Capulet, his wife and daughters;
 My fair niece Rosaline and Livia;
 Signor Valentio and his cousin Tybalt;
 Lucio and the lively Helena.
 (1.2.64-72)

Rosaline's name comes late in the list. Presumably Shakespeare included her because that is the only way to get Romeo to agree to go to the party, but the list also reveals something about her that we have not been told: she is Capulet's niece – this is in both quartos (at this point Q2 was being set from Q1, so if there was a second thought we wouldn't know it – the folio text, however, is identical). Why suddenly make Rosaline Capulet's niece? If wooing a Capulet is such a problem in the case of Juliet, why is it not an issue with Rosaline? But perhaps it is; perhaps this casts some light on Rosaline's refusal to be wooed – Romeo calls her imperviousness to him a devotion to chastity, "She'll not be hit / By Cupid's arrow" (1.1.207-8), making her a conventional sonnet heroine; but is it perhaps instead a quite sensible recognition that romance with the enemy family is a bad idea?

This might open up a whole backstory, in which Romeo is compulsively drawn to the enemy, a romantically suicidal streak: he is doomed not by the stars but by his perverse romantic tastes – he says it himself, viewing the aftermath of the fight at the opening, "Here's much to do with hate, but more with love" (1.1.174). The two

have everything to do with each other, are aspects of each other. The Italian source for the play, one of Matteo Bandello’s *Novelle* (1554), includes an overt version of this hypothetical backstory: in Bandello, Romeo proposes marriage to Giulietta precisely as a way of ending the feud between the two families. The romance is public, and political, and it is defeated by the older generation’s refusal to go along with this resolution of the conflict, the continuing wish for reciprocal revenge. This was the basis for Bellini’s brilliant opera *I Capuletti ed i Montecchi*, which has nothing to do with Shakespeare, but as a way of viewing the plot serves as a powerful commentary on the play, opening up its very private world to its very public implications.

Returning to the list of invitees to the ball, we notice, right in the middle of line 5, that Mercutio is also on it. Capulet has said this is a list of people he loves. Mercutio is Romeo’s best friend. What is Mercutio doing there? Editors make nothing of this, but surely it ought to pull us up short, just as short as learning that Rosaline is Capulet’s niece. At the very least, it indicates that the two sides in the quarrel certainly are not clearly defined. It starts to look as if the beginning of Q1’s opening chorus, “Two household friends alike in dignity”, which has always been considered paradoxical, or even corrupt, might not be wrong. “From civil broils broke into enmity”—civil in the context of “friends” needs much less explanation than it does in the context of ancient grudges. If we consider the guest list, the play is not about inveterate enmity but about friends becoming enemies and enemies becoming lovers. Here’s much to do with hate, but more with love.

It hardly needs to be added that one becomes aware of all this only as one reads the play. Performances allow no time for such questions; plays are not books. But this play has become a book (or really, two books, followed by a proliferating series of derivations). Nevertheless, the printed texts are, after all, versions of the original scripts, and therefore ultimately of Shakespeare’s imagination. It is worth adding that one characteristic of Shakespeare’s imagination, in play after play, was a love of red herrings.

Mercutio’s Queen Mab speech (1.4.53-95) is one of the play’s great moments, though a curious point about it is how detachable this great moment is: it is nothing but a performance. It does not

advance the plot, and even Romeo objects to its inclusion in the scene – “Peace, peace . . . / Thou talk’st of nothing” (95-6). It is eminently excerptable, though marginally less so in Q2 than in Q1, since Q2’s version is interrupted by Romeo in the middle of a sentence.

There are several tiny puzzles in Mercutio’s performance, which are interesting because they are so curiously resistant to analysis. In Q1, Queen Mab is the size of an agate in a ring worn by a burgomaster – this is a measure of the fairy’s smallness, but it also indicates a large agate, large enough to serve as an adornment to high civic office; a showy agate then. In Q2 the burgomaster is an alderman (1.4.55). A burgomaster is a civic official in a Flemish or Dutch town; alderman is the English equivalent. Neither, of course, has anything to do with Verona, but the domestication of the fantasy in Q2 seems worth noting – very literally domesticated in this case: Shakespeare’s father was for a time the Stratford alderman, and subsequently the High Bailiff, the equivalent of mayor. Aldermen, then, are familiar figures, our fathers, our neighbours; whereas burgomasters are foreign, and to that extent exotic; and the Flemish and Dutch live well and like to show off. Does that part of it translate into aldermen – were aldermen notoriously showy? Was Shakespeare’s father? Did he sport an agate ring? Does this tiny change, if it was Shakespeare who made it, say anything about his attitude toward his father’s eminence? Was he proud of it, or perhaps a little embarrassed by his father’s performance in the role? By 1596, the date of the play, his father was bankrupt, accused of usurious and fraudulent dealings; he had resigned or been removed from all his public offices, and had stopped going to church to avoid being arrested for debt. 1596 is also the year Shakespeare revived his father’s petition for a coat of arms, a declaration that, despite his reverses, he was nevertheless a gentleman. Is there any nostalgia in the passage? Which way did the revision go? Alderman is universally adopted now, and the change may be explicable simply as an editorial clarification. But perhaps the revision went the other way: did Shakespeare perhaps have second thoughts; did alderman involve a painful nostalgia or a deep family embarrassment, safely distanced by a change to burgomaster?

There is another strange small dissonance a little further on: in Q1, Queen Mab’s wagoner is “Not half so big as is a little worm /

Picked from the lazy finger of a *maid*. In Q2 the worm is “*pricked* from the lazy finger of a *man*” (1.4.65-6). The change from *picked* to *pricked* is a change from bland and vague to vital and specific, which suggests to me that Q2’s version is a revision. The change of the gender is more puzzling. Most of the figures assaulted by Mab in the speech are male – she drives over men’s noses, through lovers’ brains, over courtiers’ knees and lawyers’ fingers; but she also meddles with ladies’ lips, and presses maids when they lie on their backs, “Making them women of good carriage” (94) – preparing them, that is, for men. The speech is largely a masculinist fantasy; hence, perhaps, the change from “picking” to “pricking”, and the association then of pricks with men’s fingers, not women’s. Elsewhere, of course, Mercutio’s language is notoriously phallic: “the bawdy hand of the dial upon the prick of noon” (2.4.110-11); the threat “to raise a spirit in his mistress’ circle / Of some strange nature, letting it there stand / Till she had laid it and conjured it down” (2.1.24-5); and especially the joke about “that kind of fruit / That maids call medlars when they lie alone”, a joke so dirty that Mercutio’s gloss, “O that she were / An open –” (37-8), where “open” is part of a word which lexicographers now assure us should have been “open-arse”, a slang term for the medlar, was rendered by Q1’s compositor “open etcetera”, and by Q2’s “open, or” (so that the lines read “O that she were an open, / Or thou a popprin pear”).

Q1’s “open etcetera” assumes we are all in on the joke; Q2 retains the smut but makes it both vague and part of a pair of genuinely pointless alternatives: O that she were an open anything, just woman defined by her openness to penetration – and this is presented as contrafactual, O that she were; if only, *magari*. But then, the fantasy continues, alternatively, O that *you* were a phallic fruit, the poppering pear. A poppering pear is a normal-shaped pear, with its phallic implications; the medlar has a soft cavity at its centre. As a pair of alternatives, Q2 presents an image of pure frustration; without the open whatever, the phallic fruit has nothing to penetrate: the poppering pear cannot be an *alternative* to the medlar; the point is that they fit together. Editors assume a misreading of something by Q2’s compositor, but it is clear that Q2’s printer simply did not get the point (whereas Q1’s compositor knows exactly what he is doing). In any case, Q2 loses the wit. Both

readings register discomfort, or even embarrassment; the page has a decorum that is not incumbent on the stage. If open-arse is what Mercutio said, the joke in the theatre was not only bawdy but sexually polymorphous, with the identification now of the mistress's "circle" with any receptive anus.

To return to the worm that is "pricked", rather than "picked" from the finger, in Q2 it comes from within the digit; in Q1 it is merely picked off it – the sexual implications this time are clear enough (things *come out of* pricks), and they point to masculine sex, though in this case the sex is solitary, masturbatory; hence perhaps the additional implication that laziness, whether in men or women, breeds only worms, in the body or out of it. All this of course goes by so fast in the theatre that none of these issues arise – that is, we are being told more than we can apprehend; we miss a lot, necessarily: it is too sudden, too like the lightning. The book slows us down so we can savor the poetry; but it also makes heavy weather out of wit that on stage is mercurial (or Mercutial).

According to Dryden, Shakespeare said he had to kill off Mercutio because Mercutio would have killed the play.³ Certainly the attitudes toward women and sexuality expressed in his great setpiece undercut the romantic idealisation on which the love of Romeo and Juliet depends. But Juliet's character is different in the two texts. I focus here only on her speech "Gallop apace you fiery-footed steeds" at the beginning of 3.2. In Q2 this is a major soliloquy, thirty-one lines long. In Q1 it is all of four lines. Here are the whole speech in Q1 and the opening of the speech in Q2. Though it is natural to assume that Q1 must be a cut text to speed things up on stage, the parallel lines in Q2 look like a revision:

- Q1 Gallop apace you fierie footed steedes
 To *Phoebus* mansion, such a Waggoner
 As *Phaeton*, would quickly bring you thether,
 And send in cloudie night immediately

3 In the essay "Defence of the Epilogue; or, An Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age" (Dryden 1900, 1.174).

versus

Q2 Gallop apace, you fierie footed steedes,
Towards *Phoebus* lodging, such a wagoner
As *Phaetan* would whip you to the west,
And bring in clowdie night immediately.

“Whip you to the west” has more snap than “quickly bring you thither”, and works better with “Towards Phoebus’ lodging” than with the more specific and localised “To Phoebus’ mansion”. Q2 gives a direction and an action, Q1 a destination and a conclusion. And since twenty-five lines later Q2’s Juliet says “I have bought the mansion of a love / But not possessed it”, this would be a reason for Phoebus’ mansion to be revised out of line 3 in a later version of the speech. But did Juliet not originally have this sensational setpiece, or was it not a part of the play on the stage? It includes many of the play’s most famous bits: “Lovers can see to do their amorous rites / By their own beauties”; “Come, civil night, / Thou sober-suited matron all in black, / And learn me how to lose a winning match”; “Come night, come Romeo, come thou day in night”; and a seriously problematic one, “Give me my Romeo; and when I shall die, / Take him and cut him out in little stars, / And he will make the face of heaven so fine, / That all the world will be in love with night. . .” (3.2.21-4). Q4 (1622) changes “when I shall die” to “when he shall die”, but all other early texts, including the folio, read “when I shall die”.⁴ Editors in the past regularly corrected “I” to “he”. Recent editors, however, including Jill Levenson in the Oxford edition, retain “I”, citing the ambiguity in “die”, the common Elizabethan term for an orgasm. Levenson does not, however, explain how to interpret the passage. Can Juliet really be imagining Romeo dead, cut up and stellified in order to celebrate her first orgasm?

As an anticipation of the wedding night this setpiece would seem to provide a critical romantic context. Juliet’s character deepens and matures in it (and, if “when I shall die” is right, reveals an interestingly kinky side). It is difficult to imagine the performers wanting to truncate it, though perhaps that is the

⁴ The fifth quarto (1637) also reads “he”.

view of a reader who has lingered over the poetry – we cannot imagine it cut simply because it is so familiar. Similarly, Juliet’s big final setpiece, the potion speech (4.3.14-58), a piece of bravura melodrama, is far shorter in Q1 than in Q2, seventeen lines as against forty-three. Here again one suspects both cutting in Q1 and revision in Q2; but if Q1 is the play on the stage, were these showpieces not precisely what audiences came to hear? Perhaps in another kind of play; but speed is of the essence in this tragedy of accidents, and lingering over poetry is a luxury best indulged by readers. The potion speech in modern productions is generally felt to be an embarrassment. In Franco Zeffirelli’s famous film it was replaced by just four words not written by Shakespeare: “Love give me strength”. This was presumably all Olivia Hussey could credibly manage.

2.

When Thomas Coryate saw women performing in plays in Venice in 1608, he expressed surprise that they were as good as the boys playing women in London:

I saw women acte, a thing that I never saw before . . . , and they performed it with as good a grace, gesture, and whatsoever convenient for a Player, as ever I saw any masculine Actor. (1611, 247)

Modern critics often cite this with a certain incredulity that anyone should be surprised that women can play women. But Coryate is not surprised that women can play women; he is surprised that women can perform well on stage. It is the modern reaction that is naïve and uninformed: acting is artificial, not natural; to make it look natural requires a good deal of training and talent. English boys had years of formal training in elocution and oratory; boy actors in addition frequently came to the stage as trained singers, so that they were already trained performers. Girls in England had little of that sort of training, and none on an institutional level. Coryate also recognises that what is required to perform as a woman is not anything gendered, but the appropriate “grace” and “gesture”,

which are equally available to male and female. Samuel Pepys half a century later, when women were performing regularly in English playhouses, made the same observation about Edward Kynaston: he was “the prettiest lady that ever I saw”.

Still, there are Shakespearean roles that we find difficult to imagine could have been written to be played by a prepubescent boy: was Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra, Paulina, Juliet’s Nurse, really played by a thirteen-year-old? The question probably only reflects what we have grown used to, the history of performance over the past three hundred years. For us, romantic ingenues age into Lady Macbeth or Cleopatra; and age further into Paulina or the Nurse. But on the one hand, we have Ben Jonson’s epitaph on Salomon Pavy as evidence that youth could perform old age quite convincingly on the Jacobean stage; and on the other, there is no reason for Paulina or the Nurse to be played as old. Paulina need be no older than Hermione; and since the Nurse had a child the same age as Juliet, who was born when her mother was fourteen, there is no reason why she should be older than twenty-eight, which is Lady Capulet’s age. I have seen both these roles played by attractive young women, and they work powerfully well – the Nurse especially was a revelation. As I wrote in “Shakespeare all’italiana”,

The Nurse, who was not elderly, but looked to be in her thirties . . . played the role throughout in a tightly wound emotional state, almost as a hysteric; so that the instant reversal, her abandonment of Juliet (“Marry Paris; Romeo’s a dishclout to him”) made perfect sense – she was always very close to being out of control, and the performance gave an unusual sense of how dangerous she is in the play, how dependent Juliet is on her, and how ultimately unreliable she is.⁵

3.

In a number of places Shakespeare and other dramatists of the period make dramatic capital out of the gender crossing of the all-male stage. When in *Cymbeline* Imogen escapes to Wales and

⁵ See Orgel 2022, 153-4.

prepares to undress and disguise herself as a young man named Fidele, she says she is “almost a man already”. Indeed, to undress in this theatre is to reveal yourself as male, in the most basic way. In *Twelfth Night*, Orsino and Olivia have fallen in love with the same young man, Cesario, the cross-dressed Viola. Only the costume, the chosen role, distinguishes Cesario from Viola and Viola from her twin Sebastian, who is ultimately, effortlessly, substituted for her in Olivia’s affections. But if falling in love with a cross-dressed woman is the same as falling in love with a man, what is a man except the costume and the manner? The gender of these figures is mutable, constructed, a matter of choice.

In fact, the play declares the costume essential – that is, the essence of Viola is declared to be her costume. At the play’s conclusion, when Cesario/Viola is finally revealed as a woman, Orsino declares that he cannot marry her until her woman’s clothes are produced: she is not a woman until she is dressed as one. The clothes, moreover, have to be her own, the ones she wore in her opening scene, when she decides to dress as a man – borrowing a dress from Olivia or buying a new one are not offered as options. Her original clothes are necessary to identify her not simply as a woman, but as Viola. At this point there is, however, a final twist in the plot: Viola’s clothes cannot be produced; the play cannot conclude with marriage. The clothes are in the keeping of the sea-captain who brought her ashore, and he has been arrested on some unnamed charge of Malvolio’s. He cannot be required to produce them while he is in jail, and only Malvolio can release him. But Malvolio has no interest in being helpful. He has stalked off declaring that he will be “revenged on the whole pack of you” (5.1.371) – this has all materialised in the final two minutes of the play, and it effectively aborts the traditional happy ending of comedy. Clothes are the woman.

In an example I discussed in both *Impersonations* and the essay “Seeing Through Costume”, *The Honest Man’s Fortune*, by John Fletcher probably in collaboration with Nathan Field and Philip Massinger, an exceptionally attractive young man named Veramour serves the hero Mountague, the honest man of the title, as his page. He is also openly in love with Mountague, and spends a good deal of effort attempting to woo Mountague away from his beloved

Lamira. Mountague’s resistance is goodnatured but firm; however, elsewhere in the plot pretty boys are assumed to be the sexual equivalents of women, and Veramour himself attracts the libidinous attentions of a lord named Laverdine, who considers him eminently available (he looks, Laverdine says, like “a disguised whore”). They have the following exchange:

LAVERDINE. I mean thou shalt lie with me.

VERAMOUR. Lie with you! I had rather lie with my lady’s monkey:

’twas never good world since our French lords learned of the Neapolitans to make their pages their bedfollows . . .

(Beaumont 1647, 163)

The displacement of the homoerotic desire onto the French and Italians is sufficient to render it comic rather than obscene. Veramour’s response should establish him as definitively both male and unseducible, but Laverdine decides that the refusal can only indicate that Veramour is in fact a woman (who has, moreover, had sex with the monkey and considers it preferable to him). Veramour’s defence against the vicissitudes of being a pretty boy is then to claim that he is, in truth, a woman in disguise; but this suits Laverdine well enough, and he at once proposes marriage. As the play concludes Veramour appears in women’s dress: he has decided to be female – he says he learned the transvestite stratagem from plays – and much is made of the difficulty of distinguishing boys from women. Here, however, unlike the end of *Twelfth Night*, clothes do not make the woman: an onlooker observes tartly that a hand thrust into the subject’s underpants would settle the matter, a commonsense observation that would undo a great many disguise plots. Thus unmasked, Veramour is sent off to the city to become an apprentice, and Laverdine is finally vanquished by the revelation that his beloved is male after all (though given the obvious catholicity of a sexual taste that finds attractive boys indistinguishable from whores, the logic of this resolution is not airtight). The joke here still depends on the reality of male and female – Veramour’s clothes, *Twelfth Night* to the contrary notwithstanding, do not make him a woman. In a supremely metatheatrical gesture, Fletcher’s theatre denies one of its most basic truths.

But elsewhere the theatre of the age is equivocal, both about the matter of gender distinctions and about their ultimate utility. In Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*, a young woman named Euphrasia, in love with the hero Philaster and in disguise as his page Bellario, decides at the conclusion, with Philaster firmly married to his beloved Arethusa, to remain permanently in drag and continue serving the lord and lady as both "a Hylas" (Hercules's male lover) and "an Adonis" (Venus's lover), that is, to remain male, but equally attractive to men and women – no sex presumably, in either role. Fifty years later, by the 1670s, the gender issue, while still clear enough, had become both significantly less problematic and more overtly sexual. Rochester's maim'd debauchee reminisces:

Nor shall our Love-fits, Cloris, be forgot,
 Where each the well-look'd Link-boy,* strove t'enjoy
 And the best Kiss, was the deciding Lot,
 Whether the Boy us'd you, or I the Boy.
 (1950, 34)

|*good-looking torchbearer

No need for disguise or pretense; boys for Rochester have something for everyone. And by the 1690s Thomas Southerne in *Sir Anthony Love* and and Sir John Vanbrugh in *The Relapse* could include lechers whose objects of desire were unequivocally male, and who could be described as gay in the modern sense (in Southerne, moreover, the young man, though initially unwilling, is eventually quite forthcoming).

These are minimal, one might even say parenthetical, comic turns – there is nothing in Restoration drama comparable to the romantic homoerotics of the transvestite stage, for example, of Marlowe's *Edward II*, Shakespeare's Antonio and Bassanio, Antonio and Sebastian. In fact, the few instances of Restoration homoerotics are not at all romantic, but blatantly sexual. Did the presence of women actors preclude the acknowledgment of serious romantic attachments between men? Or had social mores simply altered? In fact, it seems more likely that the introduction of actresses is another symptom of the same social transformation, not its cause. The change of tone was noted at the time – Lucy

Hutchinson, wife of a Roundhead officer and a fervent Puritan, ascribed it to the new morality of Charles I’s court, which set the fashion:

The face of the court was much changed in the change of the king, for King Charles was temperate, chaste and serious; so that the fools and bawds, mimics and catamites of the former court grew out of fashion; and the nobility and courtiers, who did not quite abandon their debaucheries, yet so revered the king as to retire into corners to practise them. (1806, 69)

(This is all Hutchinson has to say in Charles’s favour; elsewhere he is “a prince that had nothing of faith or truth, justice or generosity, in him”; 70). The Caroline court also introduced women actors into the royal theatricals – court ladies now not only danced in masques, but also took speaking roles in plays, and there were professional women singers as well. This innovation was prompted by Charles I’s French queen Henrietta Maria; it was the practice at the French court, and was widely deplored by English moralists. The social transformation, however, extended beyond the court, and was literary as well as theatrical. The version of Shakespeare’s sonnets that became standard from 1640 until the end of the eighteenth century was John Benson’s revision, in which pronouns referring to the beloved young man were changed from male to female, and the poems were given titles that firmly established the beloved as a woman: a Shakespeare in love with a man was simply no longer an acceptable Shakespeare. Romance was heteronormative. And if Southerne’s and Vanbrugh’s stage was able finally to acknowledge homoerotic sexual desire, it was only parenthetically and momentarily: there is nothing comparable in the eighteenth century – even the lechers in *Fanny Hill* are given surprisingly few sexual options (Fanny’s introduction to sex is lesbian, punctuated with assurances that sex with men is better; thereafter all the sex is standard, though a sailor once attempts unsuccessfully to bugger her) – and for Rochester’s debauchee, the happily polymorphous libidinous time was already long past.

4.

Shakespearean comedy is for the most part about wooing, whereas marriage for the most part eventuates in tragedy – the plays that continue where comedy ends, with a happy marriage, are *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*. What happens to those witty, articulate women of *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It* after they become wives? Do they harden into Lady Macbeth and Paulina? There are few comfortable marriages in Shakespeare, nor are the conditions of Shakespearean marriage designed for comfort, at least for women: would Rosalind or Beatrice accede to the limits imposed on the behaviour of wives by Kate at the happy end of *The Taming of the Shrew*? If marriage really is the goal of comedy, why are there so few happy marriages? Is Shakespeare's comedy comic only because it ends with marriage (or more often, just before marriage) – that is, stops there?

This theatre institutionalises a complex of assumptions about women, Othello's assumptions that Iago works on, and all Leontes's fantasies about Hermione: women as girls are good fun, clubbable with men, and moreover represent a great deal of money (always an essential element in their attractiveness); but wives are uncontrollable, characteristically lustful and untrustworthy; and when they mature they are shrewish and "masculine", as Leontes calls Paulina "a mankind [i.e. mannish] witch" (2.3.67) – or alternatively, paradoxically, they become dangerously, destructively attractive, like the "wrangling queen" Cleopatra, unmanning the Roman hero, even dressing him in women's garments when he is drunk and helpless. Hamlet berates his mother for enjoying sex with her husband, and deplores her sexual interest in his father too ("she would hang on him / As if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on", 1.2.143-5). The assumption is that it is unnatural and disruptive for mature women to be sexually active and attractive. In the play, that comes across as a pathological opinion of Hamlet's, but it also represents a cultural norm: women, in effect, to be "natural", must stop being women when they are no longer girls.

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Getting Things Wrong

I am concerned here with a number of Shakespearean cruxes and with the way criticism and editorial practice have undertaken to deal with them, whether by elucidating them, explaining them away, or otherwise accounting for them. I begin with some problematic names and textual muddles, and conclude with a group of geographical puzzles. The examples are so various that it is difficult to generalise about them, but they do seem to represent something that we might call characteristically Shakespearean.

I begin with some names and places. Early in *The Tempest*, Ferdinand, identifying himself as the king of Naples, describes to Miranda the loss he has just endured:

FERDINAND . . . myself am Naples,
 Who with mine eyes, never since at ebb, beheld
 The king my father wrecked.
 MIRANDA Alack, for mercy!
 FERDINAND Yes, faith, and all his lords, the Duke of Milan
 And his brave son being twain.
 (1.2.435-9)

The Duke of Milan referred to is Antonio, Prospero's younger brother, who twelve years earlier had usurped the Milanese throne, and sent Prospero and Miranda into exile and probable death. The fact that Antonio has a son will come as a surprise only to those who are already familiar with the play. Prospero has already given Miranda an extended, often passionate account of their history full of a sense of his grievances against his brother, and even at this early point in the drama it is clear that the plot will revolve around family relationships. A brave son of Antonio as a contrast to his unregenerate father and a parallel to Ferdinand is just what we would expect.

But Antonio's son is never heard of again. How shall we explain this? Explanations have varied according to how much of a lapse one considers it, and, if it is a lapse, how far one wants to exculpate Shakespeare from having committed it. Lewis Theobald, who was the first to notice a problem, gave the first and simplest explanation, that Shakespeare changed his mind without changing the line. This begs a few questions, to which I shall return; but it is certainly unproblematic. J.O. Halliwell-Philips complicated the explanation with a touch of romance: the missing son is a remnant of Shakespeare's source, as he put it, "the old play or novel on which this drama is founded". The old play or novel, however, is an invention of Halliwell's – *The Tempest* is notoriously a play without a source. A curious syntactical explanation was proposed by John Holt in 1749: that "his" in "his brave son" refers to "the king my father", and that his brave son is therefore Alonso's son, not Antonio's: Ferdinand is talking about himself. Though the syntax is just barely possible, the problems are obvious – Ferdinand would not refer to himself as "brave", and he knows that he has not suffered the fate he believes has befallen his father. Nevertheless, the argument has resurfaced from time to time. Samuel Johnson, though he glossed passages immediately preceding and following this one, did not comment on the elusive son. Coleridge proposed that Antonio's son was in one of the ships that got away – the problem here was solved by enlarging the play's geography, though Antonio's total obliviousness to the loss of his brave son was not part of Coleridge's story. Howard Staunton looked around the play for unaccounted-for personnel and proposed that Antonio's son was Francisco; the problem, he declared, had been introduced by the folio editors, who instead of listing Francisco as such in the cast list "carelessly coupled him with Adrian as one of the 'Lords'". But Francisco's paternity is nowhere alluded to in the dialogue, and in 2.2 Antonio contemptuously lumps him with the rest of his toadying followers. The folio editors, we must conclude, were simply following the script. Staunton himself was not entirely persuaded, and continued with an alternative possibility: "Otherwise, we are driven to suppose that to shorten the representation, the character as delineated by Shakespeare was altogether struck out by the

actors, while the allusion to it was inadvertently retained".¹ So we are driven to conclude (who is driving us?) that the play was originally longer and had more characters, and these were ineptly cut: the culprits are now the actors, and Shakespeare in either case is in the clear.

Or not. J. Dover Wilson elaborated the argument, and now laid the blame squarely on Shakespeare: Antonio's son was evidence of an earlier, longer and far more circumstantial version of the play, beginning with the usurpation, which Shakespeare then revised and compressed, leaving some loose ends.² Frank Kermode, in his 1954 revision of his Arden edition, hazarded a very cautious speculation: "One hesitates to say so, but it looks as though Shakespeare began writing with a somewhat hazy understanding of the dynastic relationships he was to deal with, though he was certainly clear enough about the main theme of the play" (1954, 38).

What is this all about? Why didn't Theobald's simple common sense explanation settle the matter? Why as late as 1954 did Kermode – not a critic known for caution in his aspersions – hesitate to imply that it just might be the case that Shakespeare hadn't quite finished thinking through the plot before he started writing, that perhaps the play hadn't sprung all at once full-blown from Shakespeare's head, with no second thoughts or uncertainties? Why the tiptoeing around the question? How had Shakespeare criticism become so hazardous, and what was Shakespeare being rescued from?

Critical editions tend to assume that every puzzle can be explained – the big surprise in the foregoing history of Antonio's son is Johnson's silence, which looks, in retrospect, like an admirable, if uncharacteristic, restraint. At a similar, but more striking moment in *Othello*, the first time Cassio is mentioned he is described as "a fellow almost damned in a fair wife", but Cassio for the rest of the play is unmarried. At this crux, Johnson volubly threw up his hands, ascribing the missing wife to "corruption and obscurity" (a double culpability, then, the obscurity Shakespeare's, the corruption that introduced by his various executors). But for this kind of puzzle, it

1 All are cited in Shakespeare 1892, 86-7.

2 The full argument is in Wilson's Cambridge edition (Shakespeare 1921, 79-85).

is difficult to see what sort of explanation there could be other than that Shakespeare changed his mind. The real question would be, then, the question that Theobald's explanation begs: if Shakespeare changed his mind without changing the line, how did these bits survive all the rehearsals and revisions, to remain a permanent feature of the text? And the answer about these two examples must be that they were simply too insignificant to bother with, like many Shakespearean inconsistencies, noticeable only to editors (and thus first noticeable in the eighteenth century); and in a larger sense, that no version of a Shakespeare play is ever a final version; the play is always a process, in progress; there is always unfinished business which any performance – or any edition – will undertake to complete as it sees fit.³

In fact, the editor's play is a very different matter from the actor's and, it has to be admitted, from the author's. In the cases of Antonio's son and Cassio's wife, the only credible elucidations assume an explanatory narrative about Shakespeare's mode of composition: he worked fast, he changed his mind, he didn't revise much. This sounds simple, but it does have implications for critics who want to see Shakespeare as always really writing for publication, always thinking of a final, canonical play. Editors can't afford such luxuries. For an editor, my simple narrative is often all one has to rely on.

I have written in the essay "Revising *King Lear*" (Orgel 2022) about the moment in *King Lear* when Lear sends Kent off with "letters. . . to Gloucester", and then the letters become, in the rest of the sentence, a single letter, addressed not to Gloucester but to Regan; (1.5.1-3), and I have discussed the editorial strategies for dealing with this and other textual puzzles in the play. I suggest in that essay that that the process of composition and revision was unsystematic and piecemeal, in other words, theatrical: the muddles, then as now, go by quickly on stage; they pose problems only for editors and readers. Perhaps we misrepresent the plays by undertaking to elucidate everything. In one sense, we certainly do: there are, quite simply, some things in the texts of most plays of the period that the author was not clear about, and a lot more that

³ For a number of examples and a larger context, see Orgel 1994.

even the original audience must have missed. Editors do experience and respond to and appreciate the plays they work on, but their experience is not the same as the audience's. It is, moreover, not quite the reader's experience either, because the editor's attention is directed toward errors and cruxes and muddles, precisely toward the kind of inconsistency I have been tracking. This is what editors do, what we need editors for, to sort out the muddles and inconsistencies, and at least account for the errors, even if they balk at correcting them; to get us through the cruxes and give us a clean, readable play. Even attentive readers are not obliged to think of the text as *error* in this way.

But if these muddles are simply, so to speak, an accident of composition, there are nevertheless confusions elsewhere in Shakespeare that my narrative about the playwright's creative process will not help with. For example, at the beginning of *As You Like It*, reference is made to Orlando's and Oliver's middle brother Jaques, who is away at school; and then in the next act another character of some significance, also named Jaques, is introduced. Anyone seeing or reading the play for the first time will reasonably assume (as all my students do) that the Jaques of act 2 is the middle brother, and it takes some time and some puzzlement and some attention to the cast list – which would not have been available to either Shakespeare's original audience or his original readers – to realise that this is not the case. When the original Jaques finally appears, near the end of the play, the other Jaques is onstage, and the speech headings, and the character himself, have to refer to the first one not by name but as "Second Brother" and "second son". This confusion seems utterly pointless, but is obviously deliberate; and one wonders how it survived the first rehearsal ("Will, can't we call him George?"). Similarly, in the *Henry IV* plays, a character named Lord Bardolph is introduced into Part 2, which already includes a character named Bardolph. No amount of elucidation will account for either of these, and my textual narrative does not get beyond the observation that for reasons that are not clear, Shakespeare introduced these confusions.

I now return to Theobald, and a famous crux. The account of Falstaff's death given by Mistress Quickly in *Henry V* reads, in the folio text, ". . . His nose was as sharp as a pen, and a table of green

fields . . . ”. This was the text from 1623 until 1733, when Theobald decided that Shakespeare’s manuscript had been misread: that “a table of green fields”, which seems to make no sense, was incorrect, and that instead, in dying, Falstaff “babbled of green fields”.⁴ This emendation, indisputably a stroke of editorial genius, seemed to have restored what Shakespeare must actually have written. Bibliography here communicated with Shakespeare himself – or at least, with Shakespeare’s manuscript before it reached the printer.

But if we agree that Theobald was correct, and that a compositor setting the type in the printing house was misreading Shakespeare’s handwriting, what happened before the play got to the compositor? “Table” is the 1623 folio’s reading; so the folio’s printer is the culprit. But the only other substantive text, the 1600 quarto, in a passage that bears little resemblance to the folio text, at this point reads not “babbled” but “talk” – Mistress Quickly says she heard Falstaff “talk of flowers” – and it is apparent that the folio was not set up from this very garbled quarto, but directly from Shakespeare’s manuscript. So neither of our two primary sources reads “babbled”: “babbled”, even if it is impeccably correct, is all Theobald. What then does the quarto tell us about the folio’s crux? Q seems to be a reported text provided by two actors; but if F’s “table” is a misreading resulting from a visual error in deciphering Shakespeare’s handwriting, so would Q’s “talk” seem to be. In a reported text, however, the error ought to be an auditory one. If Q is really a reported text, then, the counter-argument would have to be that the reporters heard “babbled” but remembered it as the simpler concept “talk” (or “talkd”, as it is usually emended). This argument would be more persuasive if “talkd” looked less like “table”. So has Theobald been perhaps too ingenious? Is “talked” the source for both “table” and “babbled”? Moreover, even if we agree that “babbled” was what Shakespeare wrote, it might also be the case that Shakespeare’s handwriting was hard for everyone to read, and was misread not only by the folio compositor but by the scribe who prepared the promptbook, who would also have been working from Shakespeare’s manuscript – and the promptbook,

⁴ *Henry V*, 2.3.16-17. The emendation was first proposed in Theobald 1726, 138, and subsequently included in Theobald’s edition of the plays in 1733.

after all, would have been the source of the actors' scripts too, and thereby of what the reporters heard, or misremembered. Maybe the actors were (incorrectly) saying "table" or "talkd" all along. For Theobald's purposes, however, what the actors said, what the reporters recalled, what all the audiences from 1599 to 1726 heard, was irrelevant; his communication was with Shakespeare's mind – or at least, with Shakespeare's bad handwriting. Theobald's intuition here effectively abolished both the performing and the textual traditions, the play's collective memory.

Surely the oddest thing about this sort of puzzle is to decide where the playwright fits into it. In 1599, Shakespeare was on the spot to see that the promptbook and the actors got it right – how could "table" (or "talkd") be wrong? Didn't Shakespeare thunder "'babbled', not 'table', idiots"; and why didn't the embarrassed prompter then immediately correct the error? How did the confusion survive the first rehearsal, to remain – like the second Jaques, Cassio's fair wife, Antonio's shipwrecked son, Lear's letters to Gloucester – a permanent part of the play? And of course it has to be added that we do not know that they did: we really do not know what the relation was between what the actors performed and the manuscript that was given to the printer. The book is not the play.

Theobald's emendation of "table" to "babbled" has been acknowledged to be a stroke of editorial genius, and his justification for it was enviably simple: the original made no sense. There are in fact paleographical difficulties with emending "table" to "babbl'd", but few editors have wanted to take them into account: the emendation, in my opinion, is almost certainly incorrect (if I were editing the play, I would print "talk'd", and nobody would be happy), but the attractions of sense over nonsense are very powerful, and babbled makes a much more attractive sense than talked. If Theobald's version was right, however, what was right about it has varied according to the various critical narratives it has generated. We all agree that there was no table, but why was Falstaff babbling of green fields? A decade before Theobald, Pope, in one of his more inventive editorial moments, had explained the table of green fields by declaring the phrase to be a stage direction that had mistakenly got into the dialogue:

This nonsense got into all the following editions by a pleasant mistake . . . A table was here directed to be brought in, . . . and this direction crept into the text from the margin. Greenfield was the name of the property-man . . . (Shakespeare 1725, 3.422)

Alas, poor Greenfield: once Theobald got rid of the table, the green fields required a different narrative. Theobald's story was that people who are near death and delirious with fever think about running around in green fields. Warburton scoffed: Falstaff by this time was not feverish, his feet were as cold as any stone, and running around outdoors would have been the last thing on his mind. Nevertheless, George Walton Williams, who has given an admirable survey of the genesis of this part of the editorial romance (Williams 1999) cites a number of very respectable critics, including Ernest Schanzer and Peter Ure, who have Falstaff imagining himself cavorting in the green fields of his presumptively pastoral childhood. For critics of the recent past, the most attractive explanation has had Falstaff turning to prayer on his deathbed, reciting the twenty-third psalm. No surprise here: the siren of intertextuality is especially hard for modern editors to resist.

The trouble is that the crucial line in every version of the psalm available to Shakespeare involves not green fields but green pastures, as it did a decade later in the Authorised Version, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures". In Sternhold and Hopkins and the Bishops' Bible, moreover, the pastures are not even green, but "pastures fair" and "pastures full" (Sternhold 1562, 48). Did anyone in Shakespeare's audience hearing green fields think green pastures (to say nothing of pastures fair or full)? Or are we perhaps to assume, in an act of critical desperation, that Mistress Quickly, reporting Falstaff's dying words, heard pastures but remembered them as the simpler concept fields?

I turn now to a group of geographical cruxes. Shakespearean geography rarely coincides with the geography one finds in atlases and gazetteers, though the two occasionally intersect, sometimes tantalisingly, as when we learn that English players, including three who were to become Shakespeare's colleagues in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, performed at Elsinore in the 1580s. But for the most part Shakespeare's places seem to have little to do with

real places, and indeed, in several striking cases even to conflict with them.

I begin with the most obvious and notorious example: in the middle of act 3 of *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare lands Antigonus and the infant Perdita on the seacoast of Bohemia. In 1619 Ben Jonson made fun of Shakespeare's geographical ignorance, observing to William Drummond that "there is no sea near [Bohemia] by some hundred miles" (Jonson 2012, 5.370.157). For over a century afterward there is no record of anyone else objecting to the setting, which also goes unremarked through the earliest eighteenth-century editions, of Rowe, Pope and Theobald. Hanmer in 1744 finally noticed Bohemia and declared it a "blunder and an absurdity of which Shakespear in justice ought not to be thought capable" (Shakespeare 1744, 2.502). He duly rescued Shakespeare by emending the setting to Bithynia, and blamed the folio's printers for misreading their copy. Subsequent editors were unconvinced and remained largely untroubled by Shakespeare's geography. The theatre, however, was more receptive, and both Garrick's and Charles Kean's productions set the play's pastoral scenes in Bithynia – why geographical accuracy should have come to matter more on the stage than in scholarly editions is doubtless a question worth pondering. But we need to remember that "Bohemia" too is of the stage and all Shakespeare: Jonson objected to the geographical solecism four years before the play's publication. Bohemia is what he heard in the theatre, and the folio compositors were following their copy. The printers are in the clear.

Critics, however, intermittently continue to worry the issue and undertake to rescue Shakespeare from himself. Several (one as recently as 1955) have argued that because for brief periods in the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries Bohemia was part of the Austrian empire, it therefore did have a seacoast. This is like arguing that since 1850 Kansas has had a seacoast; nevertheless the claim still regularly reappears on the Shakespeare internet forum. Most commentators have been content to explain the error away, as Pafford and Schanzer in their editions did, by observing that it is simply adopted from Shakespeare's source, Robert Greene's

Pandosto.⁵ However, if there is a problem, this merely shifts it from Shakespeare to Greene.

H.H. Furness observed that there may, however, be a point to it: the *New Variorum* cites three instances in which references to the seacoast of Bohemia are used to characterise a foolish or ignorant speaker (Shakespeare 1898), and S.L. Bethell argues on the basis of these that the setting was an old joke, analogous in modern times to references to the Swiss navy. He suggests that if W.S. Gilbert had included an admiral in the Swiss navy in one of his operettas, this would have been a good indication to a Savoy audience of how seriously to take the plot – *The Winter's Tale*, after all, declares itself a fairy tale (Bethell 1947).⁶ We might agree with Bethell that the *Variorum*'s examples settle the matter, except for the fact that Jonson didn't get the joke – how common could this commonplace have been? This may serve as a cautionary instance for our critical treatment of commonplaces – sentences beginning "Everybody in the Renaissance would have recognised . . ." are usually untenable.

How real is Shakespeare's Bohemia (or as my students would put it, what is its ontological status)? More to the point, does this question have anything to do with geography? There is, to be sure, a place called Bohemia on the map, but is that the setting for the pastoral scenes in *The Winter's Tale*? Has it anything in common with the play's world? What associations would the geographical Bohemia have had for Shakespeare's audience – other than its lack of a seacoast, and apparently not all of them knew even that. They probably did all know that it was staunchly Protestant, but that fact seems entirely irrelevant to the play. The English edition of Ortelius, published in 1603, includes a map. It says of Bohemia what is clear from the map, that it is entirely surrounded by forests and hills (that is, it has no seacoast), and that "the ground is exceeding good for cattle and corn". A pastoral world then, at least? Not really: the Bohemians also mine metals and precious stones; and there are about eight hundred castles, towns and cities, of which the most

5 In Greene, however, the locales are reversed: the Polixenes character's kingdom is Sicily, the Leontes character's Bohemia, and the seacoast is in Sicily.

6 For a full discussion see my Oxford *Winter's Tale*, 38-9.

noteworthy is Prague, on which Ortelius spends the rest of his account of the country, concluding that the populace “are greatly given to drunkenness, pride and pomp” – not a pastoral world at all, and nothing much to do with Shakespeare’s sense of the place (Ortelius 1603, 52v). Presumably, then, he didn’t look at Ortelius. But perhaps all this is irrelevant; perhaps maps are irrelevant, as they are in the case of that other Bohemia *La Bohème*. Puccini called his Italian opera Bohemia, in French, for reasons having nothing to do with geography. Puccini’s Bohème is Paris, and a certain kind of life one could live there. What is Shakespeare’s Bohemia, if it is not a place on a map?

I propose that Shakespeare’s Bohemia, with its seacoast, bears and shepherds, is pretty much normative for Shakespeare’s treatment of location. It is “elsewhere”, but an elsewhere whose limits are set within the drama, not outside it. Why Bohemia, then, and not an invented name? Because this confrontational fairy tale is still part of our world; these kingdoms are not east of the sun and west of the moon. In fact, in Shakespeare it is the invented names that are anomalous: Portia’s Belmont is unique. Locations may be vague – another part of the forest, a wood near Athens, a moated grange, an island somewhere between Naples and Tunis – but they are not nowhere. As for why Bohemia, why not? Who knows what associations the name had for Shakespeare? It has received an unusual amount of critical attention, but as a dramatic location it is in no way atypical. Prospero and Miranda, when they are expelled from Milan, are set adrift in a leaky boat. Critics since the eighteenth century have pointed out that Milan is not a port; counter-critics have argued that through a system of canals and rivers one could get from Milan to the Mediterranean by water (presumably accompanied that far by their captors: there would have been little point to setting them adrift in a canal). But if Bohemia can have a seacoast, surely Milan can be a port. The Messina of *Much Ado About Nothing* has no specificity at all, but Shakespeare does know that Sicily was a dependency of Spain, hence the presence of Don Pedro in a position of authority. It also, like the distant locales of many other Shakespeare comedies, has room for an unquestionably English clown, Dogberry, and the mysteriously anglicised villain, Don John, and comprimario, Benedick. The Vienna of *Measure for*

Measure has much in common with the London of Shakespeare's time, and almost nothing in common with the capital of the Holy Roman Empire beyond its Roman Catholicism; but for the purposes of the play, that element is sufficient. There is no local colour to identify the Athens of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as ancient Athens, or the Verona of both *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Romeo and Juliet* as anything other than a fictional place – Shakespeare clearly liked the name and the source stories; and for all the rich sense of detail in *The Merchant of Venice*, its topographical specificity does not extend beyond five allusions to the Rialto (which Shakespeare, like all American tourists, thinks is the name of a bridge, rather than the name of the district in which the bridge is located). Certainly both its financial dealings and its maritime economy suggest as much about London as about Venice, and at least one recent critic has noted that the name Shylock is unambiguously English, not Hebrew or Italian.

Consider Illyria, the setting for *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare's principal source for the play, Barnabe Riche's story of *Apolonius and Silla*, takes place in Damascus.⁷ Why did Shakespeare change it to Illyria? An informal survey of Shakespeareans several years ago determined that a significant number believed Illyria was a fictional place, like Belmont, and had no idea that for almost a millennium the name signified, more or less, the modern Croatia and Bosnia. There are, of course, reasons within the play for why this might be a natural, if ignorant, assumption – the play does not prompt you to look at a map, any more than Barnabe Riche prompts you to find out facts about Damascus. Nevertheless a conference on Shakespeare and the Eastern Mediterranean was convened in Dubrovnik in 2006, designed to set the record straight – two years earlier there had been a Catholic University conference on the same subject in the same place, but apparently there was more to be said. A google search produces a substantial number of articles and lectures in the past twenty years on the rich cultural heritage of Dalmatia, many of which invoke *Twelfth Night*.

But is that what Shakespeare meant by Illyria? Here are some facts about Illyria. At one time or another it included much of the

⁷ The second story in Riche 1594.

Balkans. In the sixteenth century it was variously subject to Turkey, Venice and Hungary. Here is what the English edition of Ortelius's geography, which is exactly contemporary with *Twelfth Night*, says about Illyria: the coastal areas have better ports than the Italian coast opposite it, olives and grain are grown there, and there are excellent vineyards. The inhabitants were formerly much given to "robbing and thievery", but now are more civil and tractable. The most famous city is Ragusa (the modern Dubrovnik). Some political history follows, and Ortelius concludes by observing of the Illyrian province of Styria that it "nourisheth a people greatly troubled with an infectious scurf" (1603, 89v).

What country, friends, is this? If you came away from seeing the play in 1603 and wanted to find out something about its setting, would any of this be relevant? Shakespeare must have had a reason for changing Damascus to Illyria, but was the reason geographical?⁸ Countries are, in any case, not simply places on a map. They have demographics as well as geographies, and if Shakespeare's Illyria is Ortelius's Illyria, why is it populated by people with names like Orsino, Olivia, Malvolio – to say nothing of Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek? In fact, demography offers an odd connection between Shakespeare's Illyria and Shakespeare's Bohemia through Shakespeare's Vienna: the two prisoners in *Measure for Measure* who figure in the plot to substitute a head for that of Claudio are Barnardine, "a Bohemian born", and Ragozine, "a most notorious pirate" – though the latter's native Ragusa could, of course, be the one in Sicily. It is hardly worth adding that nobody in Shakespeare's Vienna has a German name.

Louise George Clubb, with whom I have been discussing the Illyrian question over many years, has proposed a provocative if distant set of interrelationships. There is in fact a connection between Illyria and at least the *Ingannati* tradition, of which *Twelfth Night* is a part – this is a literary connection, not a geographical one. The Croatian

8 Lada Cale Feldman offers evidence that Renaissance Ragusa/Dubrovnik was known for its festival atmosphere, and argues that it is therefore an appropriate setting for a play with the title *Twelfth Night* (1998). But this is surely special pleading: Orsino's court is never said to be in Ragusa; it is simply somewhere in Illyria.

poet Marin Držić, who took his degree at the Sienese Academy in the 1540s and Italianised his name to Marino Darsa, upon his return to Ragusa/Dubrovnik wrote the most famous Croatian play *Dundo* (Uncle) *Maroje*, performed in Ragusa in 1551 – Clubb describes this as the first of the many adaptations of the *Ingannati* outside Italy. *Dundo Maroje* is not much like *Twelfth Night*, and Shakespeare certainly was not aware of it, but it includes disguises and deceptions, and though there are no twins, a cross-dressed woman figures prominently in the plot. It is a prodigal son story: Maroje has entrusted a large sum of money to his son, whom he has betrothed to a local girl and sent to Ancona and Florence, to do business and outfit himself for the forthcoming wedding. But the boy instead has gone to Rome, a sink of iniquity, squandering the money and spending his time with courtesans. Maroje follows him there, to recover what money he can and attempt to reform the profligate. (The “Uncle” of the title is a generic term for an elderly man; the boy is his son). The fiancée also pursues him, disguised as a boy. The play is thus about Illyrians in Rome, and here the geography really does matter: if “why is Illyria inhabited by Italians and Englishmen?” is not a meaningful question about *Twelfth Night*, “what are Croatians doing in Rome?” gets to the heart of *Dundo Maroje*.

But now let us turn to some cases where geography does seem to matter. In *All's Well That Ends Well* Helena leaves her home in Roussillon, in southern France, to pursue her beloved but unresponsive Bertram to Florence. However, she claims to Bertram’s mother, the Countess, that she is on her way to the shrine of St. Jacques le Grand, which is in Compostela, in northwestern Spain (3.4.4-7). A glance at a map reveals that Roussillon is roughly halfway between Compostela, directly to the west, and Florence, to the southeast – Florence is in the opposite direction from Compostela, but that seems initially to be the point: Helena’s claim seems designed to cover her tracks and throw the Countess off the scent. If you wanted to follow her, you would be heading the wrong way if you went toward Compostela. When Helena gets to Florence, however, she continues to claim that she is on her way to St. Jacques le Grand, and the widow with whom she lodges says “You came, I think, from France”, expressing no surprise. Other pilgrims to the same shrine pass the same way in

the scene. Clearly in the play, the route from southern France to northern Spain is southeast via Florence. As Susan Snyder says in the Oxford edition,

the geography here represents either error or deliberate mystification by Shakespeare; a third hypothesis, that Helen uses the pilgrimage only as a cover for her pursuit of Bertram to a different place, must account for other pilgrims to St. Jacques who pass through Florence” (Shakespeare 1993, Note to 3.5.26-8).

It must also account for the widow’s reaction – that is, for her lack of one.

I have no solution to this puzzle, but in the play it does send you to a map. Its very specificity makes it matter. If it is mystification on Shakespeare’s part, to what end? The baffling thing is how unnecessary it seems: all the Italian states were Catholic; all of them had a multitude of shrines. A pilgrimage to almost any Italian shrine south of Padua might reasonably pass through Florence – Assisi, Loreto, Rome. Why Compostela?

But the alternative assumption, that Compostela merely indicates Shakespeare’s geographical ignorance, is complicated by a very similar example closer to home, in which an English audience might be expected to be familiar with the geography, and Shakespeare cannot have been ignorant of it. In 2 *Henry IV*, after the conclusion of the hostilities in Yorkshire with the disbanding of the rebel army, Falstaff is directed by Prince John of Lancaster to return with him to the court at Westminster. Falstaff asks permission to go via Gloucestershire, which Prince John grants without comment; Falstaff subsequently explains to Bardolph that he wants to see Justice Shallow, from whom he intends to borrow money. Now the road from Yorkshire to London runs pretty much straight south down the east side of England – Gloucestershire is a very large detour westward. If this is intended as a geographical joke about how far out of the way Falstaff is willing to go to cadge money from his old friends, Shakespeare has done nothing to set the joke up – in the play, Justice Shallow has not been located in Gloucestershire until just this minute. In the only previous scene in which he appears, 3.2, no location is identified. Why not put him

in Cambridgeshire, or Berkshire, or anyplace not so preposterously out of the way? In this case Shakespeare presumably knows his geography, since Gloucestershire is adjacent to his native Warwickshire; but Prince John asks no questions – perhaps he is just as happy to be rid of Falstaff for a good long while. Is this the joke, and is the audience expected to be in on it? Nothing more is made of it, but when Pistol brings the news to Falstaff and Shallow that the king is dead, Falstaff, preparing to speed to London to claim his place beside the new King Hal, says “We’ll ride all night”. The distance from Gloucester to London is 113 miles – three nights might do it; perhaps two if you pushed the horses really hard. The puzzle would not exist if Shakespeare had put Justice Shallow in Walthamstow. It is surely intentional.

But perhaps neither of these examples has anything at all to do with geography. Perhaps they are just two more of the gratuitous confusions, red herrings and loose ends that Shakespeare, for whatever reason, liked. There is, however, one case where the matter of implausible distances and impossible journeys really does seem to function dramatically in a quite specific way, which I have discussed in “Othello and the End of Comedy” (see above). In act 4 scene 1 of *Othello*, Othello is recalled from Cyprus to Venice because the Turks have been defeated, and Cassio is appointed in his place. The defeat took place only the day before – Othello arrives victorious from the battle just after Desdemona and Iago land, and that night is Othello’s and Desdemona’s first night together on the island, their first night together since their wedding; their lovemaking is interrupted by the drunken row staged by Iago. The emissaries recalling Othello arrive from Venice the next afternoon. This is totally implausible if one stops to think about it (which one doesn’t): how long does it take for the news of the victory to travel from Cyprus to Venice, and then for the Venetian emissaries to travel back to Cyprus?

We are taught by the history of theatre not to question such conventions; and this is one of a number of moments that make us believe there is much more time in the play than the plot allows. So in this case there is a point to the geographical impossibility: the space of this geography defines the period of time when Othello believes Desdemona and Cassio are carrying on together, the time

between Desdemona's arrival and the arrival of the emissaries to recall Othello to Venice. This is the theatrical space for and the dramatic time for Iago's scheming – the elapsed time has in fact been less than a day, but the play's geography gives Iago, and as far as Othello is concerned, Cassio and Desdemona, a good three weeks. The geographical absurdity is, moreover, not a matter of error but of outright deception. The deception, however, is not being practiced on Othello by Iago, it is being practiced on the audience by Shakespeare.

I am aware that I have concluded with a number of examples that lead us nowhere, if what we want is a general statement about Shakespeare's knowledge and use of geography. But it must be relevant that with the exception of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, none of the comedies and tragedies is set in a location that would have been familiar to either him or his audience. *The Taming of the Shrew* opens in his native Warwickshire (Christopher Sly mentions two villages near Stratford), but then the play presented for Sly's entertainment moves the action to Padua and the world of Italian farce, and never returns; Sly and Warwickshire disappear, and the play is *The Taming of the Shrew*, not *The Gulling of Christopher Sly*. This might be an epitome of how Shakespearean geography works, and how the familiar is made to feel other. Falstaff and Hal hatch their plots in a tavern in Eastcheap, and there are very specific London histories, like *Richard III*, but there are no London comedies, and even Shakespeare's Forest of Arden is not the one in Warwickshire, but the Ardennes in France. Ben Jonson, in contrast, was moving ever closer to home, setting the comedies after *Volpone* in London, and even transporting the 1599 *Every Man In His Humour* from Italy to London when he included it in the 1616 folio. The London stage at the height of Shakespeare's career was increasingly localised; city comedy was the genre of choice, and the city was usually London. But Shakespeare's city comedy is *Measure for Measure*, set in a Vienna that both is, and is not, London. He looked elsewhere, to places that were seemingly particularised only as names on a map. And perhaps that is the point: his stage was another country.

In short, every crux generates a proliferating set of critical narratives. It will be observed that none of my textual narratives ends. They all constitute only beginnings to stories which their

plays cannot complete, and which the larger dramatic narrative often contradicts. But the muddles, the loose ends, the red herrings, are also part of the excess that makes Shakespeare so much more interesting than any other dramatist, and keeps us, always, trying to explain.

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PART 3
England and the Classics

The Play of Conscience

1.

The opening is irresistible:

I have heard
 That guilty creatures sitting at a play
 Have by the very cunning of the scene
 Been struck so to the soul that presently
 They have proclaimed their malefactions
 ...
 I'll have these players
 Play something like the murder of my father
 Before mine uncle
 ...
 If he but blench,
 I know my course
 ...
 The play's the thing
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.
 (*Hamlet* 2.2.528-44)

To talk about the fortunes of *catharsis* in the Renaissance is to deconstruct this passage.

I am concerned here with Renaissance readings of the *catharsis* clause in Aristotle's *Poetics*, but I have also necessarily to deal with the prior assumption, quite common in the modern critical literature, that we now understand what Aristotle meant when he wrote that 'drama effects through pity and fear the purgation of such emotions', and that we can therefore see how far the Renaissance was, unlike us, adapting the Aristotelian dictum to its

own purposes. The two major commentators on the fortunes of the *Poetics* in sixteenth-century Italy, R.S. Crane and Bernard Weinberg, observe repeatedly – and undoubtedly correctly – that Renaissance critics tend to view Aristotle through Horatian glasses. This affects not only the obvious assumptions about the dramatic unities, but more subtly, determines the nature of claims about the social and political function of drama, its public status as rhetoric and oratory, and thereby its utility within the Renaissance state. Weinberg's and Crane's own assumptions, both about drama and about Aristotle, form no part of the discussion, but they are where I want to begin: both critics, like most commentators on Aristotle throughout the history of criticism, assume that by the term *catharsis* Aristotle is describing the effect of the drama on the audience, and that it is therefore the spectators who are purged through pity and fear. There has been no such general agreement about what the spectators are purged of. How exactly the purgation works has been a matter for endless debate; what has had little resistance is the notion that Aristotle is in fact talking about the audience here. That, therefore, is the part I wish to press on first: this has seemed to be the one thing we have thought we could be sure of about Aristotle's intentions.

For modern scholarship, the chief opponent of this view has been Gerald Else, who argues that what is being described makes more sense if we understand it as something that takes place entirely within the drama itself, an element of dramatic structure, rather than of dramatic effect. Thus the pitiable and terrible events that precipitate the tragedy – Oedipus's murder of his father, Orestes's of his mother – are purged by the pitiable and terrible sufferings of the hero. The *catharsis* takes place within the structure of the drama: it is Thebes or Athens, the world of the play, that is purged, not the audience. Such a reading makes good sense within the logic of the *Poetics* because, as Else points out, the context in which the *catharsis* clause appears is not concerned with the audience: it says that tragedy is an imitation of a serious action, that it uses heightened language, operates through performance rather than narration, and that it ends by bringing about, through pity and fear, the purgation of such emotions. Aristotle then goes on to discuss the characters, and to deduce the six parts of drama. Read in this

way, *catharsis* provides a symmetrical movement for the dramatic action. An elliptical and parenthetical shift to the psychology of audiences at this point would need some explanation (Else 1957).

Few critics have been persuaded by this argument, though to my knowledge there has been no real refutation of it, just a general insistence that it is implausible. This is doubtless true, but will hardly settle the matter: plausibility is the least transhistorical of critical categories, the most particularly time-bound. The principal objection that has been raised to Else's view is that it leaves out of account a passage in the *Politics* about the cathartic effect of music, which is certainly concerned with audiences, and refers the reader for an explanation of *catharsis* specifically to Aristotle's works on poetry. But this is less than conclusive because the *catharsis* clause in the *Poetics* can hardly be the explanation intended (it doesn't explain anything), and it is impossible to know how broadly or narrowly defined the presumably lost account of the term would have been. After all, if we are inventing definitions of *catharsis* that Aristotle might have written in some work that has not survived, we can certainly imagine one that explains the operation of elements of the tragic plot on the characters in terms of the operation of music on its listeners – for example, that the process of revelation and purgation endured by Oedipus is like the curative operation of ritual music on the pathological listener. This is not, however, Else's argument. He suggests, on the contrary, that the passage from the *Politics* is not relevant at all, that it is something Aristotle believed when he wrote it but changed his mind about when he came to write the *Poetics* (1957, 442-3). I find this as unpersuasive as everyone else has found it – critics do tend to put their worst feet forward in dealing with *catharsis*.

Needless to say, I am not claiming that this is what Aristotle wrote, but only that a formalistic argument that takes the laconic reference in the *Politics* into account is perfectly plausible. It is clear, however, why no refutation of Else has been found necessary: for all its clarity and elegant simplicity, Else's Aristotle doesn't say what we want Aristotle to say. The great disadvantage of Else's reading for the critic who wants what critics have wanted from Aristotle since the *Poetics* was first rediscovered at the end of the fifteenth century, a compendious guide to dramatic praxis, is precisely that

it makes *catharsis* a purely formal element, and thus leaves the *Poetics* saying nothing whatever about dramatic effect: if Aristotle is anywhere concerned with audiences, this has got to be the place, but this is not really correct. Else argues only that an internally consistent interpretation of *catharsis* in the *Poetics* cannot be refuted *merely* by appealing to a reference in another work which seems to imply another concept, especially if that reference is obscure or controversial in itself (1957, 441). In fact, Else's own explanation of the difference between the uses of the term in the two works, far from being new critical, is based on quite romantic assumptions about Aristotle's intellectual biography (that he changed his mind). I describe Else's reading as "new critical" below simply because it undertakes to keep *catharsis* within the limits of the text. A more particular objection to the argument as a reading of the Greek, raised by both Stephen Halliwell (1986, 355) and Elizabeth Belfiore (1992, 264), is that it requires us to take pity and fear, *eleos kai phobos*, to mean not the emotions of pity and fear, but events producing these emotions, and Aristotle specifically refers to them as *pathemata*, emotions. Else anticipates this objection, and cites a parallel usage earlier in the essay which does support his reading (1957, 228-9, ignored by both critics); but even without this, the objection seems excessively narrow. As indicated below, *pathemata*, the word normally translated "emotions", means literally "sufferings"; it includes both what the hero undergoes and how he feels about it. Indeed, to use emotional terms in this way is so commonplace that it is the criticism that seems eccentric: when Horatio at the end of *Hamlet* promises to satisfy his hearers' appetite with "aught of woe or wonder" (5.2.346), he is promising a narration about events that will evoke these emotions, not about the emotions themselves.

As a metaphor for the operation of drama on the audience, however, the notion of purgation has always been found problematic, not least in Aristotle's apparent assumption that ridding ourselves of pity and fear is something desirable. A few critics, starting in the Renaissance, have undertaken to deal with this difficulty by arguing that it is not we who are purged, but the emotions – that is, we end up with our emotions in a purified form – but this raises as many problems as it solves: what is impure about pity and fear? Moreover, most critics have been at least uncomfortable

with the medical metaphor itself, observing that its operation is at best obscure. How does the evocation of pity and fear purge these emotions? Students of classical science point out that this is not even an accurate version of Greek medicine, which worked on the whole allopathically, by opposites, not homeopathically, by similarities – that is, to purge melancholy, you made people happy, not sad. Therefore, if Aristotelian *catharsis* is really a medical metaphor, drama would purge pity and fear by evoking their opposites, whatever these might be. This has been more a problem for modern commentators than it was for Renaissance exegetes, since much of Renaissance medicine did work homeopathically, and therefore Aristotle, however ahistorically, seemed to be saying something true; but it was a truth that did little to clarify the ambiguities of the passage. The recent critic Elizabeth Belfiore, has undertaken to resolve the question by insisting on the literalness of the medical metaphor, arguing that if we conceive pity and fear as purging not more pity and fear, but their opposites (she is rather vague about what these might be), the process makes perfect sense (Belfiore 1992). She does not notice that this requires us to believe that when Aristotle says that drama effects through pity and fear the purgation of such emotions, what he must mean is that it effects the purgation of the opposite emotions. Unless “the same” in Greek can mean “the opposite”, allopathy will not solve the problem.

Aristotle wrote a compressed, elliptical and radically ambiguous passage about *catharsis* that has, historically, simply not been capable of any single firm elucidation and has defied any critical consensus. I take this as the single basic, incontrovertible fact about the passage: like so many biblical and Shakespearean cruxes, its meaning has only developed over time, has changed with the generations, and inheres entirely in the history of its elucidation. Indeed, it was the very indeterminacy of the dictum that made it so extraordinarily enabling a feature of the *Poetics* as a basis for both the theory and practice of Renaissance drama. Nevertheless, we should begin by noting the genuine insignificance of the passage within Aristotle’s argument, in contrast with the tremendous emphasis that has been placed on it by the critical tradition generally. This is the only place in the essay where tragic *catharsis* is mentioned; the clause occupies a total of ten words, and the subject is then dropped. In the one

other reference to *catharsis* in the *Poetics*, the term has nothing to do with dramatic theory but refers to the ritual purification of Orestes when he is recognised by Electra in Sophocles's *Iphigenia in Tauris*. The reference in the *Politics* is, as we have seen, equally unhelpful, merely referring the reader for a discussion of the operation of *catharsis* to Aristotle's work on poetry. Other uses of the term in *The Generation of Animals* and *The History of Animals* seem even less relevant, referring to physiological processes like menstruation, urination and the ejaculation of semen. To understand the nature of tragic *catharsis*, those ten words in the *Poetics* are all the help the surviving texts of Aristotle provide.

2.

The textual history of the *Poetics* is a meagre one. The indispensable guide to the material is provided by Bernard Weinberg.¹ No manuscript of the work was known in western Europe until the end of the fifteenth century; and it was first published not in Greek but in a Latin translation by Giorgio Valla in 1498, ten years before the first publication of the Greek text, the Aldine edition of 1508. Before this time, the essay was known in Europe only in Latin versions of Averroës's incomplete and often confused Arabic text. I begin, therefore, with the earliest translations of the *catharsis* clause.

Here is how Averroës renders the passage: tragedy "is an imitation which generates in the soul certain passions which incline people toward pity and fear and toward other similar passions, which it induces and promotes through what it makes the virtuous imagine about honorable behavior and morality" (Weinberg 1961, 1.358).² Obviously a good deal has been added to the clause to attempt to make sense of it, but one indubitably clear thing about it is that pity and fear are conceived to be good things, and far from being purged, are what we are expected to end up with. Now of course it is necessary to remind ourselves that Averroës has none of the context essential for understanding the passage in any historically

¹ For an excellent brief overview, see Halliwell 1986, 290-302.

² I have occasionally made minor adjustments to Weinberg's translations.

relevant way. He does not know what drama is, and assumes that tragedy and comedy are simply poetic forms analogous to eulogy and satire. Nor does he understand that Aristotle's categories of character, plot, melody, etc., are all elements of the same single poetic structure, but assumes them to be the names of other sorts of poetry. All these matters are, however, tangential to his real interest in the *Poetics*, which lies in its discussion of figurative language. He takes *mimesis* to mean simply the devising of tropes; he has no real concept of imitation, since he assumes that the function of poetry is merely to tell the truth and make it beautiful.

Nevertheless, despite all the confusions and lacunae, Averroes's notion that the *Poetics* promulgates a view of drama as ethical rhetoric is one that persists long after the discovery and analysis of the Greek text. Averroës in many respects continued to be the basis of Renaissance views of the essay, enabling it from the outset to be easily harmonised with Horace's *Art of Poetry*.

I turn now to the earliest Renaissance translations of the clause from the newly discovered Greek; but it is necessary first to pause over two key terms in the passage. First, the word *catharsis* itself is made to carry a good deal of philosophical and spiritual baggage when it is translated "purgation", as it generally is in English.

But in Greek the word's basic meaning is simply "cleansing" (one can speak of the *catharsis* of a house); it can imply any sort of purification, from the most elementary and practical to the most profound and complex, and the standard rendering involves an unacknowledged assumption about the context. The second term is Aristotle's *pathemata*, the word that refers back to pity and fear, usually rendered "emotions": "tragedy effects through pity and fear the purgation of such emotions". *Pathemata* too is a term upon the interpretation of which a good deal depends. It means literally "sufferings"; its root, *pathé*, is translated in Liddell and Scott's Greek-English dictionary "anything that befalls one" – what happens to you, as opposed to what you do. (In contrast, when Plato talks about the emotions, he uses the much more abstract term *thumos*, which is also the word for the soul, or the much more specific word *orgé*, passion in the sense of violent emotion.) *Pathemata* thus include both actions and reactions, both what the hero undergoes and how he feels about it. The word implies, literally, passive action, what

is implied etymologically in English by its cognates “passion” and “patience”, which together comprise the passive of “action”.

Now to our Renaissance translators. Giorgio Valla in 1498 has tragedy “completing through pity and fear the purgation of such habits”. The Latin is, “*de miseratione et pavore terminans talium disciplinarum purgationem*” (Weinberg 1961, 1.372) – “completing”, *terminans*, is an etymologically precise translation of the word usually translated “effecting”, Aristotle’s term *perainousa*, literally “bringing to an end”: both words have as their root the word for a boundary or limit. Valla’s Latin, however, probably misconstrues the force of the Greek: *perainousa* can also mean simply “bringing about, accomplishing”, which need not imply an action already in progress. Valla’s word for Aristotle’s *pathemata*, passions or emotions, is, oddly, *disciplinae*, what we have been trained to do (this is the word I have translated “habits”).

A generation later, Alessandro Pazzi, who in 1536 edited and published the Greek text with a Latin translation that became the standard one, has tragedy “*per misericordium vero atque terrorem perturbationes huiusmodi purgans*”, “through pity and fear purging passions of this kind”. The passions in this case are *perturbationes*, disorders or violent emotions, something more like the Greek *orgia* and a more loaded term than *pathemata*. In both these cases, there is obviously some bafflement about what is being described and how it works; both attempt to make the process a more reasonable one, something we would want drama to rid us of, (implicitly bad) habits, cure disorders. A more subtle problem that neither translator really knows how to address is what Aristotle means by “*such emotions*”, “*ton toiouton pathematon*”: are they the same emotions, of pity and fear, that are being purged, or others like them, or perhaps the whole range of emotions to which pity and fear belong? Valla’s version, “*talium disciplinarum*”, implies that the purged emotions are the same as the ones doing the purging, whereas Pazzi’s “*perturbationes huiusmodi*”, “emotions of this kind”, leaves the question open. Aristotle’s “*ton toiouton pathematon*”, “such emotions”, is similarly ambiguous, and many critics have taken it to be equivalent to “*ton touton pathematon*”, “these emotions”, which would clearly limit the emotions to pity and fear.

3.

This then is what the Renaissance theorist of the effects of drama had to go on when he wished to invoke Aristotle on *catharsis*. The first commentary, that of Francesco Robortello, did not appear till 1548, but thereafter elucidation and debate were frequent and energetic – the matter was, indeed, increasingly important in the development of dramatic theory. Needless to say, there was no consensus, but most commentators offered some version of one of three standard views: that tragedy is only concerned with the two passions of pity and fear, and it is therefore only these that are purged (and the argument then centered on trying to explain why this was beneficial); or that, on the contrary, pity and fear are good things and it is the other, anti-social passions that tragedy purges, for example, envy, anger, hatred, etc.; or (the position enunciated by Guarini in the course of defending his *Pastor Fido*) that tragedy purges us in a much more general way by tempering all our passions through its vision of the pity and fear inherent in the uncertainties of great men's lives, thereby making our own ordinary unhappiness easier to endure. The last of these has obviously added a good deal to the ten words of Aristotle's clause, but it is also the one that makes Aristotle most easily applicable to the uses of the Renaissance playwright.

If all these interpretations seem uncomfortably restrictive, they nevertheless enabled Renaissance theorists to project a surprisingly broad critical and psychological perspective for drama, and one not at all irrelevant to modern views of the passage. For example, Lorenzo Giacomini in 1586 produced a proto-psychoanalytic argument (anticipating the more famous proto-psychoanalytic argument of Freud's uncle Jacob Bernays in 1857), in many ways the originary modern treatment of the subject, explaining that we purge our passions by expressing them, and that tragedy permits the spirit to vent its emotions and thereby releases us from them.³ Giraldi Cintio in 1556 pre-empted Gerald Else's new critical reading by suggesting that through pity and terror, "the personages introduced

³ *Sopra la purgazione della tragedia . . .* discussed in Weinberg 1961, 1.626-8. The passage cited is discussed on 627.

in the tragedy are purged of those passions of which they were the victims” (Weinberg 1961, 2.927) – the *catharsis*, that is, takes place in the characters, not in the audience. And Giason Denores, in a strikingly historicised (not to say New-Historicised) account anticipating John Winkler by four centuries (1985), explained Aristotle’s focus on pity and fear by observing that Greek drama constituted a vital part of the citizen’s training for warfare and the defence of the state, and hence ridding the prospective soldier of these potentially disabling emotions was of primary importance to the playwright.

Of course, there are also commentators who reject all three positions, which sometimes involves rejecting Aristotle entirely – it is important to stress that, for all the age’s notorious devotion to the authority of the ancients, this was always an option. Julius Caesar Scaliger, for example, denies that *catharsis* can be a defining feature of tragedy, observing succinctly that it simply does not describe the effects of many tragic plots (1581, 29). Tasso similarly argues that *catharsis* will not account for the operation of many kinds of tragedy, citing as examples “those tragedies which contain the passage of good men from misery to happiness, which confirm the opinion that the people have about God’s providence” (Weinberg 1961, 1.571) – *catharsis* is faulted, in short, for not being applicable to medieval tragedy, and more specifically, in this construction at least, for not being Christian. But the largest issue in the debates over the clause, and the source of the general unwillingness to treat it simply as an abstruse and marginal moment in Aristotle’s argument, was its apparent assertion of some sort of real social utility for drama. It is, from late antiquity onward, generally accounted for as an answer to Plato’s charge that poetry conduces to immorality, and the consequent exclusion of poets from his ideal republic. The *catharsis* passage seems to insist that, on the contrary, poetry serves an essential function, something more vital than its mere persuasive force as ethical rhetoric, in maintaining the health of the state.

But even here, many commentators observe that such a reading puts Aristotle in the position of contradicting himself. Early in the essay he implies that the purpose of drama is to give pleasure: how then can its function also be to purge us through pity and fear? There are some attempts to reconcile these two claims (for example,

we feel better when we are purged), but the real problem is that for most Renaissance theorists the defining feature of drama has nothing to do with its medicinal character, but lies in its quality as spectacle, and its consequent ability to evoke wonder – this is what makes it different from epic poetry, though critics are fairly equally divided about whether it is therefore better or worse. Woe and wonder constitute the essence of the tragedy Horatio proposes to produce out of the story of Hamlet, and Hamlet says it is “the very cunning of the scene” that strikes the spectator “to the soul” (2.2.529-30). Poetry alone will not have this effect; theatre – “the scene” – is of the essence.⁴

As I have indicated, this is not invariably a point in tragedy’s favour. Castelvetro, for example, argues that plays are designed to appeal to the ignorant multitude, who are incapable of reading philosophy; “drama’s sole end”, he concludes, “is to satisfy the vulgar desire for pleasure”.⁵ And though this is an extreme position, it is nevertheless the case that the Renaissance is in general so deeply concerned with theatre as a way of managing the emotions that the notion of drama as a mode of knowledge (as, for Aristotle, it is a form of logic) hardly plays a significant role in the poetics of the Renaissance stage. Renaissance theorists are interested in everything Aristotle marginalises in his argument, all the emotive, performative and spectacular elements of drama, and just for that reason *catharsis*, which has so momentary and casual a presence in Aristotle, becomes for the Renaissance of correspondingly vital importance.⁶ Through the invocation of *catharsis*, most critics are able to present drama as a genre of considerable social utility. The Belgian scholar Nicaise van Ellebode sums it up when he recommends the patronage of tragedy particularly to rulers, as a way of improving the citizenry, observing that the effect of virtue is especially to hold in check the turbulent movements of the soul and to restrain them within the bounds of moderation, and since tragedy, more than that, curbs these emotions, it must surely be

4 For a detailed discussion, see my essay “The Poetics of Spectacle”, above, 24-6.

5 Castelvetro 1570; Weinberg 1961, 1.502ff. The passage cited is on 506.

6 For the marginalisation of *catharsis* in Aristotle, see Ford 1995.

granted that tragedy's usefulness to the state is extraordinary. For it causes two troublesome passions, pity and fear – which draw the soul away from strength and turn it toward a womanish weakness – to be regulated and governed by the soul with precise moderation.⁷

It is only the *catharsis* clause that makes such a claim at all tenable.

4.

The broadly political implications of *catharsis* for the Renaissance assume that the audience of drama is composed of basically virtuous people who attend the theatre for virtuous reasons, to be perfected, refined, or made better citizens. Critics like Castelvetro who deny this, who assume that audiences attend theatre primarily to be amused and that the function of drama is to amuse them (though it may thereby succeed in inculcating in them some of that philosophy they are too ignorant and shallow to read), also necessarily deny that Aristotle is correct about *catharsis*. *Catharsis* tends to be the basis for any utilitarian claim that is made for theatre in the Renaissance.

Except, that is, in England – England is in this, as in its theatrical practices generally, the great exception in the European Renaissance. To begin with, Aristotle does not figure especially significantly in English discussions of tragedy – it is to the point that the first English translation of the *Poetics* appears only in 1705, and was itself a translation of a French version. The major Elizabethan literary theorist, Sir Philip Sidney, is certainly aware of the classic essay, but he bases his claims for drama primarily on the mimetic and idealistic qualities of the art. The one gesture toward *catharsis* forms a marginal and curiously arbitrary part of the argument, but its claims are characteristically both hyperbolic and ambiguous: tragedy is praised because it “maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humors; that, with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the

⁷ Ellebode 1572, discussed in Weinberg 1961, 1.519-23. The passage cited is on 521.

uncertainty of this world” (1595: F3v). The second “tyrants”, those who “manifest their tyrannical humors” – or perhaps, on a second reading, those who fear to manifest their tyrannical humours – turn out on a third reading, after we get through the next clause, to be only stage tyrants; but syntactically they are identical to the kings; and that extended moment of syntactical ambiguity is surely to the point, a reflection of the profoundly ambiguous theatricality of the Renaissance monarchy. Tragedy is claimed here to guarantee that the only tyrants will be stage tyrants in a world where the audience is composed of kings, but it takes us three readings to assure ourselves that Sidney has moved from monarch to player, spectator to actor, and the distinction between real kings and theatrical tyrants is perceptible only through repeated and very close reading. Is Sidney’s use of the gendered “kings”, in preference to “monarchs”, “rulers”, or even “princes” (the term Queen Elizabeth used to refer to herself), a reflection of just how close to home such an observation might have hit in Elizabethan England?

George Puttenham’s account of drama in *The Arte of English Poesie* does not mention *catharsis* at all, which, however, appears instead in its most literal medical sense to explain the operation of elegies or “poetical lamentations”:

Therefore of death and burials . . . are th’only sorrowes that the noble Poets sought by their arte to remove or appease, not with any medicament of a contrary temper, as the *Galenists* use to cure [*contraria contrariis*] [allopathically] but as the *Paracelsians*, who cure [*similia similibus*] [homeopathically] making one dolour to expell another, and in this case, one short sorrowing the remedie of a long and grievous sorrow. (1589, 39)

It was, ironically, the enemies of theatre who found in the concept of *catharsis* a potent argument through its acknowledgment that drama’s function is in fact to elicit the emotions, though in these accounts, instead of freeing us from passion, theatre only enslaves us to it. Such arguments are, of course, intended as refutations of the claims to social utility made in Aristotle’s name, but in so far as *catharsis* is interpreted throughout the Renaissance as a kind of physical mimesis, an extension of dramatic mimesis into the audience, the anti-theatrical polemics, for all their obvious Platonic

bias, might be said to be perfectly Aristotelian. Needless to say, however, the *Poetics* remains a tacit source, never directly cited in such arguments. Aristotle appears as an authority on drama instead, ubiquitously, in a passage from the *Politics*, where he recommends against young men attending theatre until they are sufficiently mature. Where Italian theorists had used Aristotle to answer Plato, Stephen Gosson, Philip Stubbes and William Prynne use Plato to refute Aristotle.⁸

One would expect Ben Jonson, the most thoroughgoing dramatic classicist in Renaissance England, and thoroughly familiar with both Aristotle and the continental commentaries, at least to take some notice of the *catharsis* clause. But the long account of the *Poetics* in his *Timber, or Discoveries* is only concerned to harmonise Aristotle and Horace, and *catharsis* is not mentioned. The theory here is the mirror of Jonson's dramatic practice, which was, in its primary emphasis on the unities, more Horatian than Aristotelian. Only Milton in England saw in classic *catharsis* a genuine theoretical basis for tragedy, once again through the mediation of homeopathic medicine:

Tragedy . . . hath ever been held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems: therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such-like passions, that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight . . . for so in physic things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours. (1671, 3. Prefatory note to *Samson Agonistes*)

So Samson, his followers, the audience, all conclude the drama with what the Renaissance understood to be an impeccably Aristotelian purgation, "calm of mind, all passion spent" (Milton 1671, 101). This is surely the purest example the English Renaissance affords of the explicit utility of *catharsis* to the practice of drama. We may perhaps wish to find some notion of the Aristotelian doctrine at work in plays like *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, but if we think of their endings, it is clear that Shakespeare is far less convinced than

⁸ Gosson 1582, C7r-v; Stubbes 1583, L7r; Prynne 1633, 448-9 and elsewhere.

Milton and the theorists that the experience of *catharsis* leaves us in any way reconciled, calm or happy.

Let us now return to Hamlet on the therapeutic drama he plans to present before the king. The play within the play is itself part of a much larger purgative drama, as Hamlet's *pathemata* work to effect the *catharsis* of his father's spirit in Purgatory: in this sense, which is the sense described by Gerald Else, *catharsis* may be said to be the subject of the whole play. But Hamlet's more pragmatic notion that tragic *catharsis* is designed not for the satisfactory resolution of the plot, nor for the refining and purification of virtuous citizen-spectators, but for the exposure and punishment of criminals is, to say the least, a very special application of the Aristotelian doctrine, an *expansio ad absurdum* of the dramatic theory, so to speak. Behind Hamlet's *Mousetrap*, however, lies not only Aristotle's *catharsis* clause but a moral topos that reappears in a number of forms throughout Shakespeare's age. Thomas Heywood recounts two versions of it in his *Apology for Actors*, one of the very few defences of the stage in Renaissance England. The topos is invoked as a telling argument in favour of theatre. It concerns a woman who has murdered her husband, and years later attends a play on the same theme, and when the murder is represented on the stage, suddenly cries out in a paroxysm of repentant guilt, confesses and is duly punished. This is, in its way, a genuine instance of the Renaissance notion of Aristotelian *catharsis* at work, the pity and terror of the action eliciting a particularly pointed reaction of pity and terror in the spectator. Such a story is an obvious model for the projected revelation of Claudius's crime.

But in Hamlet's play, does the *catharsis* really work? Claudius sits through the dumb show, a clear mirror of his villainy, apparently quite impassively – directors have a good deal of trouble with this, and often deal with it by cutting the dumb show entirely (radical surgery is the normal theatrical cure for the dangerously interesting moments in Shakespeare). Nor is Claudius alone in failing to rise to *The Mousetrap*'s bait: the Player Queen's implicit criticism of Gertrude's doubly culpable remarriage, "In second husband let me be accursed; / None wed the second but who killed the first" (3.2.175-6), elicits no acknowledgement of an o'er-hasty and incestuous union, but only a famously cool response: "The lady doth protest

too much, methinks" (226). The king, indeed, seems to feel that what is potentially offensive about the play has to do with its relevance to the queen, not to him. And the point at which he finally rises and flees is not when the murder is represented, but when Hamlet identifies the murderer, "one Lucianus, nephew to the king" (240) and reveals his intention to seize the throne – when it becomes clear that the players are presenting a play about the murder of a king not by his usurping brother but by his usurping nephew. Claudius is driven from the theatre by the revelation of Hamlet's threat to his throne and his life; and the crucial admission that has been elicited by the play concerns not Claudius's crime but Hamlet's intentions. Still, Hamlet is partly correct about the ultimate effects of tragic *catharsis*, which does elicit a confessional soliloquy from Claudius in the next scene, without, however, any corresponding gesture of repentance. In effect, Claudius refuses the *catharsis*.

A more striking instance of theatrical dubiety about the effects of *catharsis* is found in Philip Massinger's play *The Roman Actor* (1629). I assume this is unfamiliar, so I summarise the plot: Parthenius, the toadying factotum of the tyrant Domitian, has an avaricious father. Paris, the Roman actor of the title, proposes curing him through the operation of dramatic *catharsis*: he will present a play about a miser in which the father will recognise his own vice, and will reform. The effectiveness of the treatment is guaranteed by reference to the usual story about the murderer brought to confess by witnessing a play on the subject. Domitian approves of the project, and orders the father to attend on pain of death. The miser in Paris's play acknowledges the error of his ways and is duly cured of his avarice, but Parthenius's father in the audience is unimpressed, and declares him a fool. Domitian warns the father that he is in mortal peril if he fails to take the play's lesson to heart, but he remains adamant and is led off to be hanged.

In a second performance, the empress Domitia, already dangerously infatuated with Paris, commands him to play a tragedy of unrequited love. This so moves her that at the point when the rejected hero is about to kill himself she cries out to stop him (like the famous spectator at the murder of Desdemona), and the emperor calls a halt to the play. The love scene has, in fact, evoked a violent passion in her, and she determines to have Paris as her lover. She

sends the emperor away, summons the actor, and orders him to make love to her; a spy informs the emperor, who watches Domitia woo Paris, interrupts them, has her imprisoned, and devises a theatrical punishment for the actor. He commands Paris to perform a play about a master who, as a test of his wife's fidelity, pretends to go on a journey, leaving her in the care of a trusted servant. Paris is to play the servant; Domitian announces his intention of playing the role of the husband himself. The play begins: the wife declares her passion for the servant. He initially refuses her, but finally yields when she threatens to claim to her husband that in his absence the servant had raped her. They embrace, Domitian enters as the husband, draws his sword, kills Paris in earnest, and pronounces a self-satisfied eulogy.

The final act abandons the metatheatrical for the dubiously moral: all the principal characters who remain alive, including the lustful empress and the toadying factotum, join together and assassinate Domitian. There is a certain Tom Thumbish quality to the dénouement, as the conspirators shout "This for my father's death", "This for thy incest", "This for thy abuse" (K4r); and the empress – whose seduction of Paris was, after all, directly responsible for his death – stabs her husband crying "This for my Paris!" But the play aborts any Bakhtinian tendency to an anarchically celebratory finale with the rather lame promise that the assassins will be duly punished by the tyrant's successor.

6.

If one wanted a text to demonstrate the genuine relevance of the wildest anti-theatrical polemics to actual theatrical practice in Renaissance England, *The Roman Actor* would do nicely. It acts out the charge that mimesis can only be pernicious, since we inevitably imitate the bad and ignore the good; it shows drama confirming us in our passions, not purging them, and far from providing moral exempla, turning us into monsters of lust. Massinger represents theatre just as Gosson, Stubbes and Prynne do, as the appropriate art for a pagan tyrant.

This is no doubt an extreme example, but it is also a very English one. A much more positive version of the same sort of directly

theatrical *catharsis* is presented in Pierre Corneille's *L'illusion Comique* (1639), in which a disapproving father, confronted with a spectacle revealing the implications of his demands regarding his son's career, relents, and the two are reconciled: across the Channel, the didactic purgation of the play within the play works just as it is supposed to do. For the most part, this does not happen in England; one of the most striking characteristics of the Elizabethan and Stuart stage is the degree to which its playwrights seem to share, and even to make dramatic capital out of, the prejudicial assumptions of their most hostile critics. Marlowe's damnable Faustus is a theatrical illusionist; the dangerously, seductively theatrical Cleopatra herself condemns the quick comedians who stage her and the squeaking actor who bores her greatness; Jonsonian drama constitutes a positive anatomy of anti-theatrical attitudes – *Epicoene*, with its transvestite con-artist heroine, *The Alchemist* and *Volpone*, those handbooks of charlatanry, greed, whoredom. Hamlet himself, attending the play within the play, offers to lie in Ophelia's lap, and thereby confirms the essential interdependence of theatre and lechery. But perhaps even these examples are cathartic, miming the moralists to disarm and expell them.

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Domesticating Seneca

1.

For modern drama, the essential classic model of tragedy has been Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannos*, largely under the influence of Freud. The drama of unperceived guilt, forbidden desire, and revelation has seemed to us to have a universal application. Moreover, Aristotle in the *Poetics* uses the play several times as a model for tragedy, confirming its timeless relevance. To the Renaissance, however, the Oedipus story looked quite different from the version we derive from Sophocles and Freud. Its centre was not the supplanting of the father in the mother's bed, but the defeat of the murderous sphinx through the solving of a riddle – a characteristic gloss on Oedipus from 1613 is “a riddle-reader of Thebes”:¹ that was the essential Oedipus.¹ In fact, Sophocles's play was not widely known in Renaissance England (nor was Aristotle's *Poetics*). Versions of the story were based principally on the mythographers, and the dramatic source was Seneca's *Oedipus*, not Sophocles's. Sophocles came late to England: the first English translation of a Sophocles play was Charles Wase's *Electra*, published in Holland in 1649, with a dedication to Charles I's daughter Elizabeth – in the year of the king's execution, the play had an obvious political relevance. The first English edition of the Greek text of Sophocles was not published until 1668; there was no English translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* until 1705, and even that was based on a French version. Sophocles's *Oedipus* was first translated into English by Thomas Francklin, playwright and Professor of Greek at Cambridge, as late as 1758.²

1 From “An Index of the hardest Words”, Du Bartas 1613, Iii7v.

2 For the medieval legend of Gregorius, modeled on Oedipus, see Aue

Seneca, however, was studied by English schoolboys throughout the sixteenth century, and translations of the plays were published from the mid-century onward. It was Seneca who provided the model for tragedy; the first English *Oedipus* to be based on Sophocles rather than Seneca was John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee's version of 1679, which was both hugely popular and criticised for being too bloodthirsty. Indeed, although it follows the plot, in the course of adapting Sophocles to the Restoration stage it violates all the classical canons, and not only that of time. It concludes with a number of violent murders committed onstage – including, once, an actual one: at a performance in 1692, the actor playing Creon mistakenly used a real dagger instead of a retractable one, and mortally wounded the actor playing Adrastus. (Dramatically, this was a multiple error: in the play, Adrastus kills Creon, and is himself killed by soldiers). In fact, Dryden and Lee were no closer to Sophocles than to Seneca.

For the English, in short, Sophocles was an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century dramatist – and, of course, an uncompromisingly modern one. Nevertheless, even to modern eyes *Oedipus* sometimes hit too close to home. When the death of Polybus, whom Oedipus believes to be his father, is revealed, Jocasta says “fear not that you will wed your mother. Many men before now have slept with their mothers in dreams”³ – the Oedipus complex for Sophocles was not some deeply buried secret, but plain common knowledge. Yeats translating the play in 1928, however, omitted the passage – Sophocles was too Freudian for Yeats. The Oedipus story, in fact, has for us required a good deal of interpretation and adaptation; if Yeats found it shocking, modern taste tends to find it uncomfortably tame. Peter Brook, staging Ted Hughes's translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* in 1968, at the play's climax had the cast parade through the audience in the wake of a giant phallus, celebrating Oedipus's expulsion from Thebes by singing “Yes, we have no bananas”.⁴

1955; and also Mann 1951. For Thomas Francklin's *Oedipus* see Francklin 1758.

3 Lines 980-1 in the Greek text. The translation is by R.C. Jebb.

4 Hughes did not know Latin, and relied on a prose translation provided to the National Theatre by David Turner, and on the nineteenth-century American translation of Frank Justus Miller published in the Loeb Library Seneca. Hughes was apparently embarrassed by his lack of classical learning,

It was a celebration of Oedipus's expulsion, but also a jolt to the audience's expectations for a solemn final catharsis, and a reminder of the purported fertility ritual roots of classical tragedy. It was also an indication of how difficult it is for contemporary culture to take the issues of this classic drama seriously. In the performance I saw, John Gielgud's Oedipus kept forgetting his lines, and had to be prompted constantly – this was, oddly, dramatically effective, emphasising the tremulousness of Seneca's Oedipus.

Dryden in his *Oedipus* explains the decision to turn for a source to Sophocles rather than Seneca by criticising Seneca's rhetorical elaboration, "always running after pompous expression, pointed sentences, and Philosophical notions, more proper for the Study than the Stage" (1679, A2v). This quality, however, was precisely what the sixteenth century (and Roman readers) pried in Seneca. Dryden and Lee duly added to Sophocles what their stage required, not only the concluding blinding and deaths but a good deal of stage business, including two appearances of the ghost of Laius, guilt made manifest, with appropriately ominous effects: *Peal of Thunder; and flashes of Lightning; then groaning below the stage.* (Dryden 1679, 38).

2.

Despite the pervasiveness of the classics in education, the English produced relatively little in the way of classical scholarship during the sixteenth century. The only editions of Greek drama published in England were Euripides's *Trojan Women*, published by John Day in 1575, and Aristophanes's *Knights* published by Joseph Barnes in 1593. In the 1550s Jane, Lady Lumley translated Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis* into prose – the translation was apparently done with the assistance of Erasmus's Latin version (Greene 1941 and Findlay 2014). It remained unpublished until 1909. George Peele translated one of the *Iphigenia* plays, which was performed by Paul's Boys sometime in the 1570s, and is now lost. The first translation of a Greek

and repeatedly lied about it, but his copy of the Loeb Seneca shows the English translation copiously annotated and not a mark on the Latin text. See Stead 2013.

play to be published in English was George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta*, a version of Euripides's *Trojan Women*, performed in 1566 and printed in 1573. The authors do certainly purport to be translating Euripides – their title reads *Jocasta: A Tragedie writte in Greeke by Euripides. Translated and digested into Acte, by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh* – though in fact they are working quite faithfully from a recent Italian version by Lodovico Dolce, which itself is based on a Latin translation. Queen Elizabeth studied Greek with Roger Ascham and was said to have translated a play of Euripides, of which nothing more is known. Considering the prestige of Greek in the educational system the lack of editions may seem surprising, but texts published on the continent were easily available, and presumably English publishers did not anticipate a sufficient market to justify domestic editions.

The works here cited joined a very small number of translations and adaptations of classical drama throughout the sixteenth century in England. Thomas Watson's Latin *Antigone* appeared in 1581; the play had apparently been performed – Gabriel Harvey saw it in London, or perhaps in Cambridge. A Latin edition of Seneca's *Hercules Furens* was published by Henry Sutton in 1561. As for English translations, in 1533 Roger Ascham compiled his *Floures of Latine Spekyng* out of Terence; the Roman dramatist was here treated as a basis not for domestic drama but for Latin conversation – the volume became a standard school text, and was reprinted throughout the century. The interlude *Jack Juggler*, published in 1565, declares itself based on the *Amphitruo* of Plautus; and the other mid-century comedies *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and *Ralph Roister Doister* are similarly modeled on Roman comedy. All ten of the plays attributed to Seneca were published in translation between 1560 and 1581. *Gorboduc*, the most overtly Senecan of sixteenth-century plays in English, is in fact Senecan only on the page: in performance it was punctuated by long dumb-shows between the acts; thus to a spectator, it would have looked very much like a traditional English tragedy. A translation of Plautus's *Menaechmi* by one "W.W." was issued in 1595 by Thomas Creede, who advertised it as "chosen purposely from out the rest, as least harmefull, and yet most delightfull".⁵

⁵ For a more detailed account, see Orgel 2021.

For Renaissance England the key Senecan drama was not *Oedipus*, with its focus on individual guilt, responsibility, and self-knowledge, but *Thyestes*, the tragedy of endless and inexorable revenge. The English taste for revenge drama was especially powerful in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and in fact, one might say that, for the history of theatre as its surviving examples allow us to construct it, revenge is the originary subject of drama, and is perhaps the reason drama exists at all. Aeschylus's *Oresteia* trilogy, in showing how society has moved beyond revenge, acknowledged revenge to be a perpetual subject. The final play in the sequence, *The Eumenides*, shows individual revenge being aborted by the gods and judicial punishment reserved to the state; but this conclusion meant that individual revenge could therefore never be satisfied. One social solution beginning in the Middle Ages was the institutionalisation of duelling, a practice that continued almost till modern times despite continued official attempts to suppress it. We may also feel that revenge was endemic in an age when resentment was an inescapable consequence of the political system – indeed, perhaps this is true of any political system: some group always has to lose.

Dryden's pejorative account of the rhetorical character of Senecan drama has been on the whole the predominant one, supported by the assumption that the plays were written not for performance but for declamation. This appears to be the case; the evidence for it is both negative and positive. There are no ancient references to the plays being performed and no Roman actors celebrated for their interpretations of Senecan roles; and the heavily rhetorical nature of the plays themselves seems to preclude performance. But as I have argued elsewhere, only the former evidence is really persuasive; the latter reflects only changes in taste, and suggests, on the contrary, that Renaissance performances of Senecan plays were perfectly feasible. I am here quoting myself: James I's favourite play, George Ruggle's *Ignoramus*, presented before him twice at Clare College, Cambridge, has very long speeches in Latin and took six hours to perform. Walter Montagu's *The Shepherd's Paradise*, written for performance by Queen Henrietta Maria and her ladies, had even longer speeches in English. There were complaints about the length from the aristocratic performers, but only the queen's opinion mattered, and the project went ahead. It was eventually performed

in a somewhat cut version, but still lasted “seven or eight hours”, according to a member of the audience writing after midnight on the night of the event.⁶ In both these cases, taste is an issue, but popular taste is not – and if Nero had wanted to see Seneca’s plays performed, they would have been performed.⁷

For English readers, T.S. Eliot made Seneca respectable again with two essays, “Seneca in Elizabethan Translation” and “Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca”, both published in 1927. These essays on the whole adhere to the traditional view of the heavily rhetorical Seneca, but diverge from it in conceiving Senecan rhetoric a strength, not a weakness. Nevertheless, crucial points depend not on the power of Senecan declamation, but on sudden extremely economical *coups de théâtre*: Antony says, “I am Antony still”, and the Duchess, “I am Duchess of Malfy still”; would either of them have said that unless Medea had said *Medea superest?* (Medea survives) (qtd in Eliot 1950, 113).

Elsewhere Eliot cites the “shock” of Jason’s final lines in *Medea*: “*Per alta vada spatia sublimi aethere, / Testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos*” (1950, 59; Go through the high reaches of thin air, / Bear witness that where you fly there are no gods). (Or “Bear witness where you fly that there are no gods”: the Latin may be construed either way; does the play conclude by denying all religion?) There is, too, the often quoted response of Thyestes to his brother Atreus, serving Thyestes’s murdered sons to him at a bloody banquet: “*ATREUS natos ecquid agnoscis tuos? / THYESTES Agnosco fratrem*” (1005-6; ATREUS Do you indeed recognise your sons? / THYESTES I recognise my brother). Arguably, however, the power of these moments depends precisely on their brevity within the surrounding rhetoric. Suddenly the orators are left without words.

3.

Early Shakespearean tragedy is imbued with Seneca, as the long rhetorical passages in the *Henry VI* trilogy and in *Richard III* testify.

⁶ John Beaulieu to Sir Thomas Puckering, January 10, 1632/3, in Birch 1848, 2.216.

⁷ For the full argument, see Orgel 2021, 129-32.

But the most obviously Senecan Shakespeare play is *Titus Andronicus*. The fortunes of this tragedy, indeed, parallel the fortunes of Seneca in the critical literature. In its own time it was one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, the first to be published, in 1594, reissued four times before 1640, translated into Dutch and German and performed on the continent. It is also the only Shakespeare play of which a depiction survives from his lifetime, the Peacham drawing, dating anywhere from 1595 to 1614-1615 (Orgel 2021, 129-32).⁸ However, the play barely survived the closing of the theatres; Edward Ravenscroft, adapting it to the post-restoration stage, declared it "the most incorrect and indigested piece in all [Shakespeare's] works . . . rather a heap of Rubbish then a Structure", and considered it unlikely that Shakespeare had in fact written it. Ravenscroft revived it, he said, in the wake of the Popish Plot, to show "the treachery of Villains, and the Mischiefs carry'd on by Perjury, and False Evidence; and how Rogues may frame a Plot that shall deceive and destroy both the Honest and the Wise". In doing so, however, Ravenscroft declared that he had greatly improved the drama: "Compare the Old Play with this, you'l finde that none in all that Authors Works ever receiv'd greater Alterations or Additions, the Language not only refin'd, but many Scenes entirely New: Besides most of the principal Characters heighten'd, and the Plot much encreas'd". The reviser's efforts were duly rewarded: "The Success answer'd the Labour"; despite "the foolish and Malicious part of the Nation . . . it bore up against the Faction and is confirm'd a Stock-Play" (1687, A2r-v), that is, performed regularly (though in fact not often) as part of the acting company's repertoire.

Titus Andronicus has no known source; nevertheless it is a very literary play. At its centre is a book; the story of Philomela, Procne, and Tereus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is both a model for action and a principle of explanation. The heroine Lavinia, deprived of the power of speech, locates the Philomela story in a copy of Ovid, and names her attackers in writing. The concluding act of revenge, the sons served up to their parents at a banquet, comes directly from Seneca's *Thyestes*. Instead of the Senecan linguistic *coups de théâtre* of the "*Agnosco fratrem*" sort, the play stages a mounting series of

⁸ See Bate's discussion in Shakespeare 1995, 38-43.

outrages – murders, mutilations, severed limbs, beheadings, finally the cannibal banquet. These were not subtle, but they undeniably made for exciting theatre. Moreover, the contradictory qualities that for later ages rendered the play unsophisticated were surely for its original audiences high points of the drama: the long, passionate, heavily ornate speeches of Aaron, Tamora, and Titus, and especially Marcus’s famous extended ekphrasis upon discovering the mutilated Lavinia:

Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,
Doth rise and fall between thy rosèd lips

...

(2.3.21ff)

For modern readers and directors these speeches are a theatrical problem: what happens onstage during all this rhetoric; what is Lavinia to do while Marcus declaims? The speech continues for almost fifty lines. But surely this is just the sort of thing Shakespeare’s audiences came to hear: passionate, ornate oratory. The point is made succinctly by an illustration in G.P. Trapolin’s tragedy *Antigone* of 1581 (Figure 1). A choral figure stands at the front of the stage addressing the audience – there is no “fourth wall”, and despite the perspective setting, no pretense of realism. The motto of the image is a quotation from Seneca’s *Thyestes*, “Let no one be too sure of good fortune, Let no one despair that better will not come” (614-15).

Peter Brook’s famous production of *Titus Andronicus* in 1957, starring Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, dealt with the theatrical problem simply by cutting Marcus’s speech. Jonathan Bate, in the Arden 3 edition of the play, defends the cut by saying that Brook replaced it with some stylised pantomime, but it is clear that Brook simply did not trust the text. Brook also, surely disingenuously, expressed surprise that critics had praised him for saving a bad play, asserting that “it had not occurred to any of us in rehearsal that the play was so bad” (Shakespeare 1995, 1). Presumably nobody in the company had read any Shakespeare criticism either; Eliot was echoing centuries of critical contempt when he declared *Titus* “one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written, a play



Fig. 1: G.P. Trapolin, the Chorus in *Antigone: tragedia* (Padova, 1581, 8). Folger Shakespeare Library, 169-641q

in which it is incredible that Shakespeare had any hand at all” (Eliot 1950, 67). Ravenscroft’s strictures, cited above, were standard from the late seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth.

The fact that the play is no longer considered bad is surely due in large measure to the success of Brook’s production. By 1971, the distinguished classical scholar Reuben Brower could call *Titus Andronicus* “the perfect exhibit of a typical Roman play” (Brower 1971, 173) – clearly it no longer needed a defence. Marcus’s ekphrasis, in fact, is profoundly revealing about the nature of Shakespeare’s stage. It not only parallels and glosses the action, it effectively pre-empted it: “But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee / And, lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue” (2.3.26-7). Marcus makes the connection with the Tereus/Philomela story immediately. Lavinia later finding the passage in Ovid merely confirms his perception. Language here is both action and interpretation.

The drama itself is as much writing as action, and in fact, the written word is strikingly emphasised throughout the play. Much of the plotting depends on letters: Aaron’s forged letter about Bassianus’s death, the letters shot to heaven by Titus’s sons, Titus’s threatening letter delivered by the clown, even Aaron’s extraordinary claim to have dug up corpses and carved on their skins “in Roman letters, ‘Let not your sorrow die’” (5.1.140). The Roman letters are there to serve as an eternal reproach specifically to Romans; but the tragic admonition is addressed as well to the literate spectators: English Renaissance education was conducted largely in Latin; moreover, English, of course, is written in Roman letters. Bodies here become texts, just as Lavinia with her tongue cut out is immediately identified as a literary allusion. Demetrius and Chiron knowingly “re-write” the Tereus and Philomela *locus classicus* by cutting off Lavinia’s hands as well as her tongue, to prevent her from weaving or embroidering a representation of her rape and mutilation, as Philomela does in *Metamorphoses* 6.

Writing in the play is both action and testimony, and handwriting is always implicitly believed. All Saturninus has to do is show Titus a letter to convince him that his sons are guilty of Bassianus’s murder. But letters in Shakespeare are as likely as not to be forged: if handwriting constitutes proof, it also as easily constitutes perjury. What, then, is the real truth of drama? Tamora says that Titus found

the letter proving his sons' guilt, and he agrees that he did (2.2.294-5); but in fact he did not – this is a case where the character (that is, the text) lies about the action we have seen taking place. The play follows its own rules, and rewrites itself. What, then, is the truth? Aaron's villainy has been self-evident throughout the play, but it only becomes evident to the other characters when a soliloquy of his is overheard – and even this is reported, not dramatised. This is a little epitome of theatre: what actors do, after all, is not perform actions but recite lines from scripts. And what audiences know is only what is addressed to them and what they overhear.

Seneca wrote *Thyestes* for an audience that already knew the plot; it turned a familiar narrative into drama. *Titus Andronicus*, a play without a source, constituted a series of unexpected calamities – until, of course, a spectator returned to see it again; for surely its popularity indicates that audiences saw it over and over. Shakespearean drama in this way created its own history.

4.

Tastes change, and theatrical tastes change rapidly. Jasper Heywood's translation of *Thyestes*, adapting Latin hexameters to English fourteeners, maintains the verse rhythm rigidly, with no variation for dramatic effect. Here, in modern typography, is Heywood's version of the "*agnosco fratrem*" moment:

THYESTES . . . Whence murmure they?

ATREUS With fathers armes embrace them quicklye nowe,

For here they are loe come to thee: dooste thou thy children
knowe?

THYESTES I know my brother: suche a gyult yet canst thou suffre well

ô earth to beare? nor yet from hence to Stygian lake of hell

. . .

(Newton 1581, 37v)

The revelation is buried in the metrics. Figure 2 shows this moment as it appears in the original edition of 1560. The typography effectively hides the rhetorical *coup*. In Thomas Newton's edition of 1581 (Figure 3), the regularity of the typography is even more

constraining. In contrast, Figure 4 shows the same moment translated a century later by John Wright, with the drama radically distorting the verse.

John Crowne's contemporary play *Thyestes* (1681) is not a translation of Seneca, and therefore is not bound by Seneca's dramaturgy, but, except for an added love-plot between Thyestes's son, here named Philisthenes, and an invented daughter of Atreus named Antigone, it follows Seneca's narrative closely. Crowne's revelation of the murder of Philisthenes (in the play Thyestes has only one son) is conveyed not by rhetoric, but by stage effects, as the father consumes wine mixed with his son's blood: "*Thyestes drinks; a clap of Thunder, the Table oversets, and falls in pieces; all the lights go out*" (Crowne 1681, 49). As for Ravenscroft's *Titus Andronicus*, though the drama is heavily rationalised and the language, as Ravenscroft says, "refined", the climax is nevertheless far more bloodthirsty than Shakespeare's, including, as a backdrop to the banquet, Aaron the Moor being tortured on the rack and stubbornly refusing to confess his villainy.

Come neere my loons, for you now dooth
 th' unhappie father call:
 Come neere, for you once seene, this greefe
 wolde soone asswage and fall.
 Whence murmur they? At. with fathers armes
 embrace them quickly nowe,
 For here they are loe come to thee:
 doost thou thy children knowe?
 Thy. I know my brother: suche a gyle
 yet canst thou suffre well
 O earth to beare? noz yet from hens
 to Stygian lake of hell

Fig. 2: *The seconde tragedie of Seneca entituled Thyestes faithfully Englished* by Iasper Heywood (London, 1560, D8r) (detail). The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, 51961

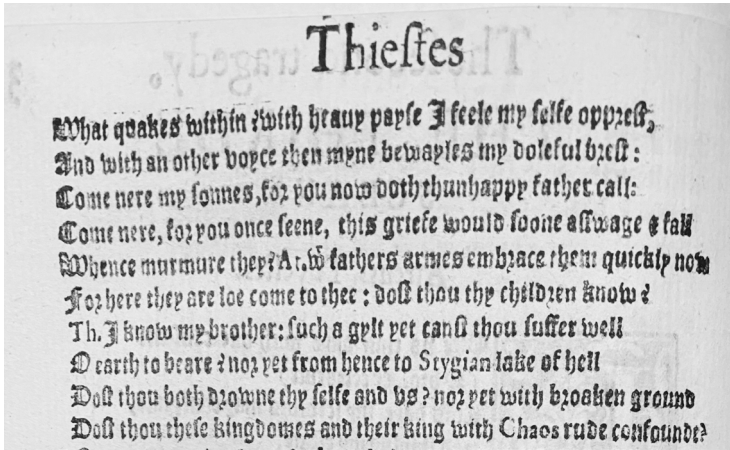


Fig. 3: Seneca *His Tenne Tragedies, Translated into English*, (London, 1581, 37v) (detail)

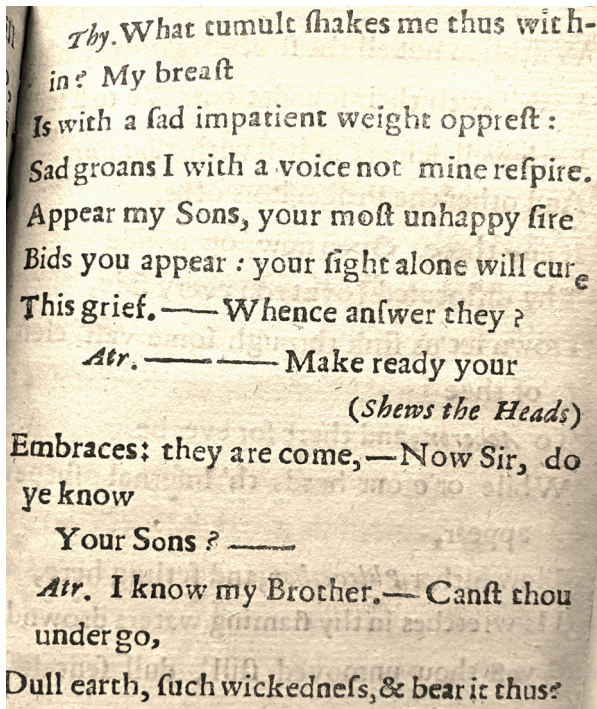


Fig. 4: J[ohn] W[right], *Thyestes A Tragedy, Translated out of Seneca* (London, 1684, 87)

5.

Revenge tragedy was an enormously popular genre partly through satisfying the sadistic tastes of the audience – this was, after all, the same audience for which public executions constituted both a moral spectacle and entertainment – but probably equally because it provided a new kind of protagonist, the hero/villain, the justified murderer. Since as a Christian you believed that murder was never justified and vengeance belonged only to God, Elizabethan revenge plays always have it both ways: they serve as moral sermons on the evils of revenge – the revenger does always lose in the end (though you might say he dies happy) – but audiences have the pleasure of seeing the revenge enacted. The effect is achieved, however, not through the moralising effects of the drama – nobody in *Titus Andronicus* argues against revenge except Tamora, who is obviously being disingenuous – but through all the action that works against the morality: the thrill of horror at the cunningly planned murders, the actual, physical shock of the violence and its attendant blood, the emotional satisfaction at seeing the villains paid off – these are the most direct effects the plays work with.

In 1589 Thomas Nashe, in his preface addressed “To the Gentlemen Students” in Robert Greene’s *Menaphon*, sneered at playwrights “that could scarcely latinize their neckeverse if they should have neede” – prisoners condemned to be hanged could save their necks by reading a Latin verse, thus showing that they were literate; but these playwrights were not even that literate in Latin.

Nevertheless, Nashe continues, “English *Seneca* read by candle light yeeldes manie good sentences, as *Bloud is a begger*, and so forth: and if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets*, I should say handfulls of tragical speaches” (Greene 1589, **3r).

Uneducated playwrights find plenty of good Senecan effects in translation; and the particular example is *Hamlet*, which Nashe finds especially egregious. There was, then, a *Hamlet* being performed in 1589 that sounded like Seneca – the *Hamlet* familiar to us dates from 1601, and was not published until 1604. The old play must have been popular, since it appears again in the theatre manager Philip

Henslowe's records as still being performed in 1594. This *Hamlet* was long credited to Thomas Kyd because Nashe says its author was born to the trade of *noverint*, scrivener – Kyd's father was a scrivener – and later in the passage says he is one of those who “imitate the Kidde in *Aesop*”, suggesting that he is another kid, or Kyd, but it is now widely considered to be a very early version of the play by Shakespeare, surviving in some form in the first quarto of *Hamlet*, published in 1603.⁹ Did Shakespeare, then, read his Seneca in translation? Many years later Ben Jonson, the most learned of English poets, would write of Shakespeare that he had “small Latin and less Greek” – did Shakespeare's Latin not extend as far as the Seneca studied in school? In that case, Shakespeare's Seneca was the Seneca of Jasper Heywood and the other translators published by Thomas Newton in *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, Translated into Englysh* in 1581.

Hamlet appears to us more ruminative than declamatory, but that is largely a consequence of our way of performing it. When Hamlet delivers his soliloquies on the modern stage he does so as if he is thinking aloud, speaking only to himself. In the beautiful 1948 film, Olivier's Hamlet did not even speak the speeches, but remained lost in thought while the soliloquies were recited in a voice-over. But look again at the actor in figure 1, the Chorus in a sixteenth-century tragedy: he is at the front of the stage, addressing the audience directly. The Hamlet of 1601 did not think his soliloquies, he declaimed them, arguing, haranguing, justifying himself, persuading the audience of the rightness of his cause and the wickedness of his enemies. Indeed, he accuses himself of overdoing it, “cursing like a very drab”. If we think about performing styles, the declamatory Seneca is manifest not merely in the early Shakespeare of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, but in the tremendous invective of *King Lear* and *Coriolanus*, the passion of *Othello*, both Prospero's rages and his philosophising.

9 Bourus 2014 – following, notably, Cairncross 1936 – makes a persuasive case for the first quarto of *Hamlet* being the ur-*Hamlet*, a view shared by, among others, Harold Bloom, Hardin Craig, and Peter Alexander. See also Urkowitz 1992 and Serpieri 1997.

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English Classical: the Reform of Poetry in Elizabethan England

1.

Humanism came to England relatively late, and even then much classical scholarship was devoted to biblical exegesis and the study of theology, rather than to the revival of what we think of as the classics. John Colet, Thomas More and the visiting Erasmus were superb Latinists, but their Latin was a living language, the language of modern literature and philosophy. Nevertheless, Christian Humanism emphasised the continuity of ancient wisdom with Christian doctrine, and Erasmus duly compared John Colet to Plato. But though Colet was thoroughly familiar with the modern Platonists Ficino and Pico, he devoted much of his critical energy to interpreting the Epistles of St Paul; and Erasmus's Greek for over two decades was put at the service of establishing a correct text of the New Testament, not of reviving ancient philosophy. Greek was introduced into the English school curriculum only after Colet re-founded St Paul's School in 1512; by the mid-century it was being regularly taught in the grammar schools, but even by the end of the century, though it was a tremendously prestigious subject, few scholars were sufficiently at home with it to work without a translation at hand – Sir Thomas North's Plutarch was based on the French version of Jacques Amyot, and even the famously scholarly George Chapman used a Latin trot for his Homer. There was unquestionably a good deal of Greek in circulation – rhetorical terms, scientific names, aphorisms – and Cambridge students were required to attend weekly lectures on Greek. Nevertheless the expression "it's all Greek to me" as a trope of incomprehensibility was already proverbial in Shakespeare's time – it appears in *Julius Caesar* (1599), and in Dekker's *Patient Grissel* (1603).

Recent scholarship has shown that England was heavily invested in classical translation, even in Anglo-Saxon times, though there was obviously no settled notion of what a classical style for English would be. But the larger question was the really elusive one: what would it mean for the principles of Humanism to inform literature in the vernacular – how could English literature become ‘classical’, not only classical in imitating the ancients, but classical in the sense subsequently applied to music, classical as opposed to popular, classical as formal, serious, and therefore good.¹ The literary forbears, Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, continued to be admired, but they lacked ‘correctness’. Nor do the exceptions rescue the English past: Sidney praises Chaucer’s *Troilus and Creseyde*, but wonders at his ability to produce it – “I know not whether to merrvaile more, either that he in that mistie time could see so clearely, or that wee in this cleare age walk so stumblingly after him” (1595, I4r). What should English literature sound like, what rules should it follow – how can we, in this clear age, not stumble? In short, how can we produce a vernacular literature that is recognisably classical, whether ancient works in translation or modern works on the classical model; make the classics our own; make our own classics? The problem for Sidney is epitomised in Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar*, which is praised, but also criticised because it does things that Theocritus and Virgil did not do. Similarly, English drama for Sidney is defective in so far as it does not emulate classical drama. The models, the tradition, are essential.

And originality? This critic was himself surely one of the two most daringly original poets of his age (the other was Marlowe, who was also one of the best classicists of his generation), but an adequate defence of poetry required of it stringent constraints on the new, continual deference to the old. There is, however, an element of question-begging in Sidney’s *Defence of Poesie*: What in the English sixteenth century would constitute being traditional, adhering to

¹ “Classic” and “classical” applied to literature, denoting both Greek and Roman writings and standards of excellence, had come into English by the mid-16th century. The OED’s first citation for “classical” in relation to music is from 1829, but in a context that clearly implies that the term was already in use.

tradition? If the tradition is classical, what should classical imply? What elements could stamp a work of vernacular literature or drama or art as classical? What does English classical look like, or sound like? Sidney's own sense of the classical in the *Defence* appears to us absurdly limited – English plays that do not observe the unities of time and place are said to be not simply incorrect, but incomprehensible; audiences are assumed to be radically unimaginative (so much for *Antony and Cleopatra*). And yet Sidney's critique of English sonnets – that as love poems they are for the most part failures because they would not persuade a mistress of the reality of the lover's passion – makes the success of the poetry dependent entirely on its effect on the listener or reader. Though the model is clearly Petrarch, the originals here produce no set of rules for sonnets; and Sidney's own sonnet sequence, though it admirably responds to the critique in the *Defence*, departs significantly from any Petrarchan model, and indeed, explicitly rejects "poor Petrarch's long-deceased woes" (*Astrophil and Stella*, 15).

But of course, the rejection of a model is also a way of deferring to it – Sidney, rejecting Petrarch, acknowledges the priority of the Italian model, how essential the Italian model is. He substitutes his own woes for Petrarch's; the result, one could say, is a new Petrarchan sonnet sequence – Sidney becomes a new Petrarch. A good deal of energy in the period went into the devising of strategies for becoming the new ancients in this way, strategies of translation and adaptation, and the invention of appropriately classical-sounding models for vernacular verse, the domestication of the classic. The *locus classicus*, so to speak, was provided by the Earl of Surrey, who in the 1530s translated two books of the *Aeneid* in a style designed to be "classical", a poetic meter intended to serve as an English equivalent to Virgilian hexameters. The meter was what became known as blank verse, and strictly speaking, all that was Virgilian about it was that it was unrhymed. Surrey presumably considered pentameter 'natural' to English, as hexameter was to Latin. The assumption was shrewdly prophetic, but in the 1530s, it would have seemed very surprising, and the translations remained unpublished until long after Surrey's death.²

2 Recent claims for Surrey's influence on Marlowe and Milton are

In 1554, seventeen years after Surrey's execution for treason, the printer John Day issued Surrey's translation of Book 4, with the following explanation on the title page:

The fourth book of Virgil, intreating of the love between Aeneas and Dido, translated into English, and drawn into a strange meter by Henry, late Earl of Surrey, worthy to be embraced. (1554)

Blank verse in 1554 is "a strange (that is, foreign) meter . . . worthy to be embraced" (*ibid.*). Historians of prosody explain that the meter was foreign in that it was influenced by the Italian *verso sciolto* – unrhymed hendecasyllables; literally 'free (or open) verse' – which by the sixteenth century was being used as an Italian equivalent to classical hexameters. But how *strange* it also was is clear from the bafflement registered by such contemporary critics as Roger Ascham, Gabriel Harvey and William Webbe as late as the 1590s – Webbe says that Surrey "translated . . . some part of Virgil into verse indeed, but without regard of true quantity of syllables" (1586, 122). Such critics assumed Surrey was attempting to write quantitatively, and therefore, naturally, found all sorts of mistakes.³ For such

surely overstated. When Marlowe translates non-dramatic poetry he almost invariably uses couplets (the one exception is his Lucan, cited below); the blank verse of his drama is for him an innovation, and judging from *Hero and Leander*, if the Virgilian *Dido Queen of Carthage* had been conceived as a little epic, it would not have been in blank verse. It is arguable that Surrey is somewhere behind Milton's blank verse, but the chief source is surely Shakespeare. I have suggested elsewhere that Milton's model for the ten-book 1667 *Paradise Lost* is the ten-book revolutionary epic *Pharsalia*, but there is no evidence that Milton was aware of Marlowe's translation of Book 1, which was published in 1600 and not reissued. Arthur Gorges' and Thomas May's translations of *Pharsalia* (1614, 1629) are in couplets. For the counter-arguments, see Gillespie 2011, 30, Cummings 2010. Cummings, oddly, asserts that "somebody, possibly Marlowe" first introduced blank verse onto the stage in the 1580s (42-3). *Gorboduc* (1561) is in blank verse; so is Gascoigne's and Kinwelmarsh's *Jocasta* (1566); and there are of course numerous lost plays from the period of which we can say nothing. Marlowe in the prologue to *Tamburlaine* (1) does say he has rescued drama from the verse of "rhyming mother-wits" (1973), but what that implies is that he is either unaware of earlier blank-verse drama, or ignoring it.

3 See Derek Attridge's excellent account in 1974, 109-11.

readers, the only verse that sounded classical was quantitative verse, which did seem to have a real future in the English 1590s – Sidney in the *Defence* argues for both the ancient and the modern systems; asserting that “Truly the English, before any other vulgar language I know, is fit for both sorts” (L2r).

To those for whom only quantitative verse was properly poetic, blank verse would certainly be “strange”, but in fact, there was nothing foreign about it. Surrey may have been imitating *versi sciolti*, but he was writing in Chaucer’s meter, simply without the rhyme. Possibly it was not recognised as Chaucer’s meter because by the sixteenth century the culture had forgotten how to read Chaucer – Chaucer was perfectly regular in middle English, but sounded rough as pronunciation changed, and, especially, as the final e’s were no longer sounded.

In 1557, three years after John Day’s edition of Surrey’s *Aeneid* IV, Richard Tottel issued, in the space of less than 2 months, what was essentially Surrey’s complete works: both the second and fourth books of the *Aeneid* in blank verse, and two separate editions of *Songes and Sonettes Written By the Ryght Honorable Lord Henry Howard, late Earle of Surrey, and other* – the volume that has become known as *Tottel’s Miscellany*. The principal “other” was Thomas Wyatt; Wyatt and Surrey were thereby all at once major poets, but Surrey was the benchmark. Wyatt’s irregular metrics were therefore duly revised to accord with Surrey’s style – Tottel, that is, understood that Surrey’s verse was ‘regular’, and was not a bungled attempt at quantitative metrics.

Tottel clearly expected some resistance. In a brief and acerbic preface, he writes “If parhappes some mislike the statelnesse of stile removed from the rude skil of common eares: I aske help of the learned to defende their learned frendes, the authors of this woork: And I exhort the unlearned, by reding to learne to bee more skilfull, and to purge that swinelike grossenesse, that maketh the sweet majerome [marjoram] not to smell to their delight” (Surrey 1557, sig. A1v) – pigs were said to hate the smell of marjoram; unlearned readers are pigs. Surrey’s “stateliness of style” is something unfamiliar, but also learned and aristocratic – it is what English poetry should aspire to, as John Day had said, it is “worthy to be embraced”. Interestingly, Tottel’s edition of the *Aeneid* translation makes no special claims.

The title page says only “*Certain Bokes of Virgiles Aeneis turned into English meter*” – Tottel, unlike Day, markets blank verse not as “strange”, but as English. And unlike the *Songes and Sonnettes*, there is no apology or justification, no critical harangue, not even the usual dedicatory and commendatory verses. The poem begins at once, on the next leaf: this is, quite simply, English Virgil.

But English classicists, even those who were not attempting quantitative verse, were without exception unpersuaded – Surrey’s blank verse seems, in the history of English prosody, revolutionary; but it did not start a revolution, and blank verse was re-invented several times before it became the norm. In 1558, the year after Tottel published Surrey’s Virgil, the first seven books of Thomas Phaer’s *Aeneid* were published. Phaer’s English classical verse was hexameter couplets (the translation was eventually completed by Thomas Twine in 1584). In 1565 Arthur Golding’s first four books of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* “*Translated Oute of Latin into Englishe Meter*” appeared. Golding’s English meter was rhyming fourteeners. The complete translation appeared in 1567, and was continuously in print for half a century – the Elizabethan Ovidian meter was essentially a ballad measure. By 1595 the verse could already be parodied by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, when Bottom suddenly breaks into a bit of old-fashioned classicism:

The raging rocks
 And shivering shocks
 Shall break the locks
 Of prison gates;
 And Phibbus’ car
 Shall shine from far,
 And make and mar
 The foolish fates.
 (1.2.27-34)

In 1621 Golding’s Ovidian fourteeners were finally superseded not by blank verse, but by pentameter couplets, with the publication of the first five books of George Sandys’s translation, completed in 1626. This set the standard for the next two centuries: Sandys is Ovid in a style that looks to us recognisably neo-classical. As for the *Aeneid*, after Phaer, Richard Stanyhurst’s version in “English

heroical verse” was first published in Leiden in 1582. English heroic verse in this case was quantitative hexameters – genuinely classical, though finally not English enough. A second edition was published in London in the next year, but there was no subsequent edition until the nineteenth century.

And then finally the tradition develops a norm. When Ben Jonson, near the end of his play *Poetaster* (1601), has Virgil recite a passage from the *Aeneid*, his prosody was pentameter couplets – although Phaer and Twine’s *Aeneid* continued to be the standard translation (the last edition was 1612), the pentameter couplet had become the norm.

Consider some samples. Here is a bit of Surrey, Dido preparing for death:

Sweet spoils, whiles God and destinies it would,
 Receive this sprite, and rid me of these cares:
 I lived and ran the course fortune did grant;
 And under earth my great ghost now shall wend:
 A goodly town I built, and saw my walls;
 Happy, alas, too happy, if these coasts
 The Troyan ships had never touchèd aye.
 (1554, G1v)

In the 1550s this would have sounded strange, though it retains some bits of traditional alliterative verse (“sweet spoils”, “great ghost”).

Now here is the opening of Thomas Phaer’s *Aeneid*:

Of arms, and of the man of Troy, that first by fatal flight
 Did thence arrive to Lavine land that now Italia hight,
 But shaken sore with many a storm by seas and land ytost
 And all for Juno’s endless wrath that wrought to have had him lost,
 And sorrows great in wars he bode ere he the walls could frame
 Of mighty Rome . . .
 (1562, A1)

Today Phaer has disappeared from the literary histories, but this really reads quite impressively, a supple verse rhythm with real momentum. This is what English Virgil sounded like for Elizabethan readers.

Here is the same passage from Richard Stanyhurst's quantitative *Aeneid*, 1582:

I blaze thee captaine first from Troy cittye repairing,
 Lyke wandring pilgrim too famosed Italie trudging,
 And coast of Lavyn: soust wyth tempestuus hurlwynd,
 On land and sayling, by Gods predestinat order:
 But chiefe through Junoes long fostred deadlye revengement.
 (1582, B3)

If you count it out you can see that it really is quantitative, though there was some fiddling with the spelling to make it work. Read aloud it has undeniable awkwardnesses ("soused with tempestuous hurlwind"); rhythmically, however, it is natural enough, though the end-stopped lines slow it down.

But here, finally, in 1601 is Ben Jonson in *Poetaster*. The emperor Augustus asks Virgil to recite a bit of the *Aeneid*, his work in progress. Dido and Aeneas take shelter in the storm:

. . . fire and air did shine,
 As guilty of the match; and from the hill
 The nymphs with shriekings do the region fill.
 Here first began their bane; this day was ground
 Of all their ills; for now, nor rumour's sound,
 Nor nice respect of state, moves Dido ought;
 Her love no longer now by stealth is sought. . . .
 (5.2.65-71)

This is a Virgil we can recognise as classical. Not that one would mistake it for Dryden or Pope – there is no playfulness; it has a formality and stiffness that are part of the Jonsonian sense of authority. But in 1601, on Jonson's stage, Virgil no longer sounds early-modern.

Jonson himself reveals that he was not the catalyst. In the first act of *Poetaster*, Ovid recites one of his *Amores*. The lines Jonson gives him are the translation done a decade earlier by Marlowe. Marlowe's *Ovids Elegies* – the first translation into English – had been published surreptitiously in 1599, in a volume with Marston's epigrams. The book had been banned and burnt by the Bishop of London, though the objections may have been to the libelous Marston, not the

scurrilous Marlowe. But Marlowe – notorious atheist, sodomite, counterfeiter – was already the classical benchmark. His Ovid was in pentameter couplets: for Jonson in 1601, that was the prosody of classical poetry, not Phaer’s hexameters, Golding’s heptameters; least of all Surrey’s blank verse. What Surrey had provided for Jonson was a model not for classical epic, but for the play itself, dramatic dialogue – poetry comes in couplets, but speech on the English stage, starting in the 1560s, and from the 1580s on, is predominantly blank verse.

Here, for comparison with the *Aeneid* samples, is Golding’s *Metamorphoses*. In Book 10, Venus learns of the death of Adonis:

Dame Venus in her chariot drawne with swans was scarce arrived
At Cyprus, when she knew a farre the sigh of him deprived
Of life. She turnd her cignets backe, and when she from the skie
Beheld him dead, and in his blood beweltred for to lie:
She leaped down, . . .
(1584, 145v)

Rhythmically secure, it reads aloud impressively (Ezra Pound called it the most beautiful book in English), and though it seems to speak with the voice of a much earlier era, it was in fact written within Marlowe’s lifetime.

2.

The refiguring of the classics into English was not a novelty, and it did not begin with Surrey. The enduring prestige of translation in England may be gaged by Chaucer’s claim that his *Troilus and Criseyde* is not original, but derives from the work of a mythical Lollius. The fictitious Roman author provides a degree of authority that would be missing from the citation of Chaucer’s real source, Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* – contemporary, not ancient; Italian, not Latin. A more puzzling example may indicate the prestige of specifically English translation: Marie de France claimed to have translated Aesop not from the Greek, but from a version in Old English by Alfred the Great – no trace of this work, nor any other reference to it, survives (see Gillespie 2011, 6).

But pervasive as the translation of the classics was, it was neither systematic nor comprehensive. Here are the highlights up to 1600, including a few surprises. The sole surviving Anglo-Saxon example is a Boethius from the ninth or tenth century. Boethius is also the only classical author Chaucer translated, if we except the mysterious Lollius, though Chaucer was obviously thoroughly familiar with Ovid. The only English Cicero before the sixteenth century is Caxton's translation of *De Senectute* from a French version, and the only Ovid Caxton's *Metamorphoses*, a prose translation also based on a French prose version, which survives in a single manuscript and was never published – did Caxton not consider it marketable? A selection from Horace in fourteen couplets appeared in 1567; up to that point there was only a single Horace poem in English. The ten tragedies ascribed to Seneca were translated in the 1560s and 1570s; most of these, like the Horace, were in fourteen couplets. The first bits of Tacitus did not appear until 1591. Marlowe's translation of the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia* appeared in 1600, seven years after his death and the year after his Ovid *Amores* – the Lucan alone of all the English classics was in Surrey's blank verse, though for Marlowe the verse may have derived not from Surrey but from drama. Often translation was in the service of the teaching of Latin. Abraham Fleming's version of Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics* was published in 1575 and again in 1589, as he says in a preface, "for the profit and furtherance of English youths desirous to learne, and delighted in poetrie . . . , not in foolish rime . . . but in due proportion and measure . . . that yong Grammar boyes, may euen without a schoolemaister teach themselves by the help thereof" (1589, A4v). Fleming's "due proportion and measure" is unrhymed fourteeners. It is quite literal, and scrupulously places in brackets words that have been included either to satisfy the demands of English grammar or to fill out the meter. And although Terence was part of the academic curriculum both in the classroom and in performance, the only translation of the plays was Nicholas Udall's *Floures for Latine spekyng selected and gathered oute of Terence, and the same translated in to Englysshe, together with the exposition and settinge forthe as welle of suche latyne wordes, as were thought nedefull to be annoted, as also of dyuers grammatical rules, very profytable [and] necessarye for the expedite knowledge in the latine*

tongue, published in 1534, and in editions throughout the century – the Flowers are taken from three plays, *Andria*, *Eunuchus*, and *Heautontimorumenos*; and as the title indicates, the volume offers only renderings of exemplary bits of dialogue. Terence was a model not for comedy, but for Latin conversation.

XXIII. *The first finging part.* SUPERIVS.

E.iiij.

Fig. 1: “Constant Penelope”, from William Byrd, *Psalms, Sonnets and Songs of Sadness and Piety*, 1588. The metrical corrections are outlined. Photo courtesy of Professor Philip Brett.

Figure 1 is one of the surprises: in 1588, William Byrd published a setting of a bit of Ovid’s *Heroides*, the opening eight lines of Penelope’s epistle to Ulysses, translated by an anonymous poet into English quantitative measures. Byrd understood the scansion perfectly, setting long syllables to minims and short syllables to

crochets. The music even corrects three errors in the metrics.⁴ And another surprise: a single epigram of Martial's, translated into English and Welsh, appeared in 1571 on a broadsheet, presumably to be sold as ballads were. The next Martial in English was not published till 1629. There was no Catullus until Jonson's Volpone attempted to seduce Celia with a translation of *Vivamus mea Lesbia* in 1606; no Lucretius until the 1650s, no Tibullus until 1694, and not even a Latin text of Propertius until 1697. The first British *Aeneid*, translated by Gavin Douglas into Scots dialect in 1513 (not published till 1553) had been in loose pentameter couplets, a striking premonition; but as anomalous for the English tradition for most of the century as it was for the Scots.

The Greek classics, not surprisingly, got a later start. Of the major prose works, the first English Thucydides appeared in 1550, Herodotus in 1584; the only prose translation popular enough to appear in multiple editions was the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus, which was first published in 1569, and reissued six times by 1627. Of verse, the first Theocritus translation, published anonymously in 1588, is, like most of the Latin translations, in either hexameter or fourteeners couplets, with the last of the idylls in trimeter couplets. The only attempt at dramatic translation, aside from Gascoigne's Euripidean *Jocasta* (of which more presently), was Jane, Lady Lumley's prose version of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* in the 1550s – this was, of course, unpublished. Thomas Watson's Latin *Antigone* appeared in 1581. Chapman's *Iliad*, published beginning in 1598, is in the usual fourteeners couplets; by 1616, for the *Odyssey*, he had switched to pentameter couplets. The standard had again been set by Marlowe, with his superb version of Musaeus' *Hero and Leander*, pentameter couplets like his Ovid – by the turn of the century this was the voice of English classicism; though it has to be added that Marlowe's little epic is not very much like Musaeus's, even with Chapman's dutiful continuation. Nevertheless Chapman, returning to the poem in 1616 to produce a proper translation (the title page declares it "Translated according to the original"), casts it in pentameter couplets.

In short, the only poets interested in Surrey's blank verse were the dramatists, starting in the 1560s, but (judging from what

⁴ For a full discussion, see Orgel 2015.

survives) not regularly till late in the century – the mid-century academic plays based on Plautus and Terence, *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, *Ralph Roister Doister*, *Jack Juggler*, make no attempt to be stylistically classical. Subsequently, with the single exception of Marlowe's *Lucan*, blank verse was useful only for dramatic dialogue: as a version of classical verse it served for Seneca in *Gorboduc* (the first surviving English play in blank verse); for Euripides in *Jocasta*, Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh's version of *The Phoenician Women*; for Plautus in *The Comedy of Errors*, Terence in *The Taming of the Shrew* (in both cases liberally interspersed with couplets, and in *Errors* at one point with old-fashioned hexameters); and for English drama of the period generally, for Kyd, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, producing an English classic theatre. But never for English Virgil, Ovid, Homer – that required another kind of 'classical'.

English epics, moreover, significantly, were nothing like any of these: the stanzaic verse of Spenser, Harington's *Ariosto*, Drayton, Daniel, derived from the Chaucer of *Troilus*, from Rhyme Royal, and from *Ariosto*, Boiardo, Tasso. The classics they recalled were those of the romance tradition; and even those had started to sound unnatural by the late seventeenth century. In 1687 an anonymous "Person of Quality" (now presumed to be Edward Howard; see Bradner 1938) brought *The Fairy Queen* up to date, as the title page advertised, with Spenser's "Essential Design preserv'd, but his obsolete Language and manner of Verse totally laid aside. Deliver'd in Heroick Numbers" (Anon. 1687). The heroic numbers were, by now inevitably, pentameter couplets. Milton, a century after Surrey, was still bucking the tide in declaring blank verse to be the natural language of English epic poetry.

3.

If these examples give us some sense of what the classical sounded like in Elizabethan and Stuart England, what did the classical look like? To us, the classical looks like the Venus de Milo or the Apollo Belvedere – these are real ancient statues, but the idea of the classical they embody is the one that Michelangelo's Renaissance

created, which only reached England two centuries later in the era of William Kent and Robert Adam, subsequently filtered through the aesthetic theories of Winckelmann and enshrined in the Elgin Marbles: white, pure, thoroughly idealised. But even the Elgin Marbles, if you look closely, give the show away: they have traces of pigment on them. In their original state, they were painted to look lifelike, and recent reconstructions of ancient sculpture show them looking more like waxworks than like art.⁵

I think most of us would agree that such reconstructions look awful – from our standpoint, the ancients paid a heavy price for authenticity. And though the Italians knew that the statues they were digging up had once been coloured, nobody ever proposed painting the David to look lifelike – the rebirth of the classical was always profoundly revisionary. Still, a pediment of the Philadelphia Art Museum, completed in 1928, has its deities in full colour, an attempt at how the Parthenon really looked.⁶ The gods are a little stiff – Philadelphia had no Phidias – but from afar, the group is elegant and convincing enough. This is certainly classical in spirit; it suggests to us, however, not the Parthenon but a much less animated version of Raphael in the Farnesina, or Giulio Romano in the Palazzo Tè – that is, not at all classical, entirely of the Renaissance.

The seventeenth-century's classical was, moreover, far more capacious than this. The greatest collection of classical remains in Stuart England was the Arundel Marbles – the Earl and Countess, over three decades, formed a magnificent art collection, including both ancient and modern works. Their collection, however, was really not what we would call an art gallery. The Arundel Marbles seem to us the forerunners of the Elgin Marbles; but they looked quite different to contemporary observers. Arundel's protégé Henry Peacham in *The Complete Gentleman* (1634) praises the statues in terms that are indicative: there is nothing about ideal Greek bodies or perfect proportion or *contrapposto*; they bring the past to life – what they give the observer, he says, is “the pleasure of seeing and conversing with these old heroes . . .”; moreover, “the profit of knowing them

5 For a plethora of examples, google ‘Classical statues painted’.

6 A colour photo of the pediment is on Google (Accessed 23 November 2018).

redounds to all poets, painters, architects, . . . and by consequent, to all gentlemen” (110-12). As for Arundel House, Peacham calls it “the chief English scene of ancient inscriptions . . .” (ibid.). It is rather startling to us to take up John Selden’s book entitled *Marmora Arundelliana* and to find in it not depictions of sculptures but pages like the one in Figure 2 (1629, 53). Peacham continues, “You shall find all the walls of the house inlaid with them and speaking Greek and Latin to you. The garden especially will afford you the pleasure of a world of learned lectures in this kind” (112).

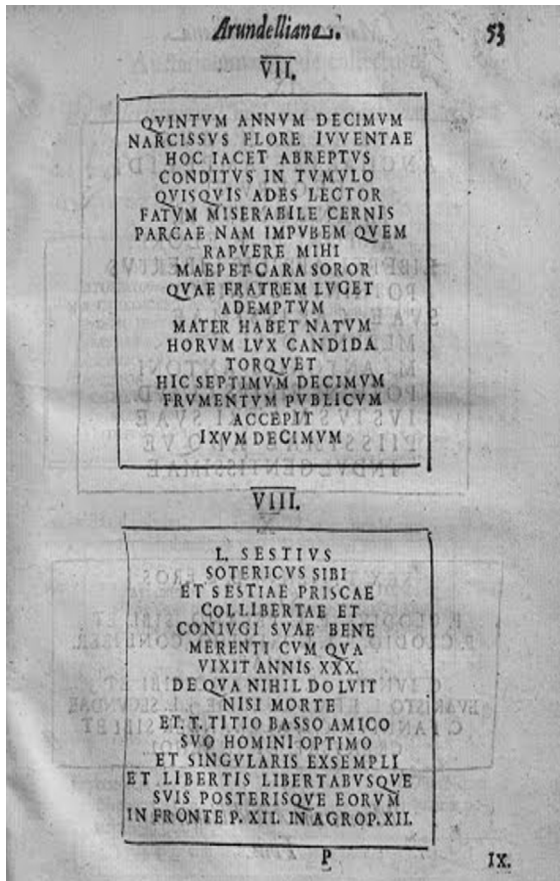


Fig. 2: An illustration from John Selden, *Marmora Arundelliana*, 1629

A world of learned lectures: the classical languages have become an aristocratic touchstone, and the collecting passion was not simply aesthetic. It also involved a profound interest in recovering and preserving the past, an education in history; and classical connoisseurship has become the mark of a gentleman, who is here identified with the artist, marked as much by his taste as by his lineage.

Such a claim involves quite a new notion of both gentleman and artist. In 1629, the year in which Selden published the *Marmora Arundelliana*, Rubens wrote from London to a friend in Paris of “the incredible quantity of excellent pictures, statues, and ancient inscriptions which are to be found in this Court” – the inscriptions are mentioned in the same breath as the works of art. His highest praise was reserved for one of Arundel’s sculptures: “I confess that I have never seen anything in the world more rare, from the point of view of antiquity” (Magurn 1955, 320-1). As the last bit suggests, to collectors like Arundel and artists like Rubens, a primary value of the visual and plastic arts was their memorialising quality, their link to the past and the vision of permanence they implied. This is why Peacham emphasises the importance and rarity not only of the statues but of the inscriptions: they were an essential element of the artistic power of the past. The word established the significance, the authority, of classical imagery; and modern masterpieces, the work of Giambologna, Michelangelo, Rubens, existed in a direct continuum with the arts of Greece and Rome.

They would not have seemed so to our eyes: look at some of the Arundel sculptures. Many of the figural works are tomb effigies, like the one in Figure 3, or votive images like those in Figure 4, from the illustrated catalogue of the marbles after they had passed from the Arundels to the University of Oxford – for us, these are archeology, not art (Prideaux 1676, 77, 82-3). But to an England in search of the classical world, they were a real link with the life of the past, especially through its death.

Moreover, the mythographers and iconographers admitted into the classical pantheon a host of hybrid figures who appear to us not at all classical, but merely grotesque. Vincenzo Cartari’s *Imagini degli Dei degli’Antichi*, a standard handbook for artists, includes many images like that in Figure 5, of a hawk-headed Apollo as the Sun with a three-headed Hecate as the moon (the heads are a dog,

a boar and a horse). In fact, classical religion was far more strange and multifarious than classical poetry acknowledged, and was never defined by the fixed pantheon found in literary texts, to say nothing of purified mythology after Winckelmann, the mythology



Fig. 3: The Arundel Marbles: a tomb sculpture, from Humphrey Prideaux, *Marmora Oxoniensia, ex Arundellianis . . .* (1676, 77)

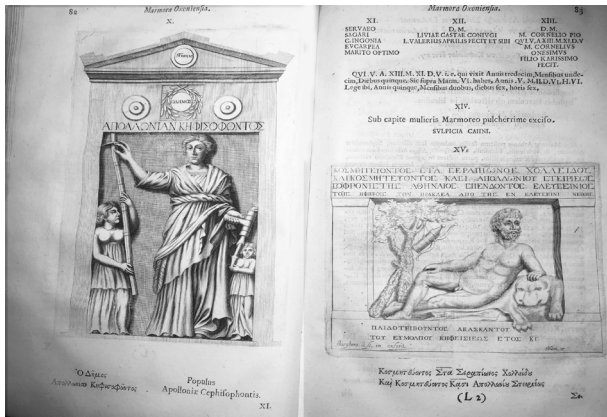


Fig. 4: Votive images, from Humphrey Prideaux, *Marmora Oxoniensia, ex Arundellianis . . .* (1676, 82-3)



Fig. 5: Bolognino Zaltieri, Diana and Apollo as moon and sun, from Vincenzo Cartari, *Imagini degli Dei degli'Antichi* (1571)

of Bullfinch and Robert Graves. The Olympian gods in Virgil and Ovid are essentially engaged in domestic comedy; but even for Ovid the divine is a history of animal transformations – Jove as a bull, a swan, an eagle – and even the Apollo myth begins with the hero's defeat of a gigantic serpent, a divine python, the remnant of an earlier cult which remained incorporated into the worship of this most rational of the gods. This is the classical that Roberto Calasso describes, frightening, grotesque. In late antiquity the Roman cults also imported the Egyptian gods, the dog-headed Anubis, the hawk-headed Horus and Ra, the ram-headed Khnum. The Renaissance felt no need to purge these as alien or inappropriate: the ancient gods to the sixteenth century constituted an endlessly malleable symbolic repertory. The classical was a mode of expression enabled by a pantheon of meaning.

The meaning could be infinitely adjustable. Thus, Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, the most scholarly of the sixteenth-century mythographers, explains the figure of Saturn as variously a legendary king of Italy, a personification of heaven or of time, and a fertility figure – he sees no need to choose among these interpretations. Natalis Comes (or Conti), the most broadly influential of the mythographers after Boccaccio's pioneering *Genealogiae Deorum*, sees contradictions as of the essence in the ancient stories, not to be adjudicated or resolved. Comes, in fact, remains one of the most genuinely useful of the mythographers, precisely because of this – for Comes (as several centuries later for Levi-Strauss) mythology is an expression of the irresolvable contradictions in culture.

4.

Let us return now to our literary texts. For most English readers, the classics were filtered through translation – necessarily in the case of Greek, which was less widely taught, but also in the case of Latin, despite the fact that Latin was taught throughout the school system, and that in so far as literature was taught, it consisted of the Latin classics. Nevertheless, there was an increasing market for translation: Latin literacy, and the refined taste it implied, did not descend very far down the social scale (remember Tottel deploring “the rude skill of

common ears” – those ears belonged to a substantial proportion of the readers he was undertaking to attract). Sir Thomas More notoriously said he would rather burn his works than see them translated into English: they could then be read by the wrong people – both the uneducated, and those people who required vernacular translations of the Vulgate, Protestants. The wrong people, whether heretical or merely ignorant, were defined by their inadequate knowledge of Latin. But apparently even the literate classes needed help: the first translations of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Caesar’s *Gallic Wars* were done from French versions, and the Greek classics posed even greater problems. I have already cited North’s Plutarch, based on a French translation, and Chapman’s Homer on a Latin one; but a more striking case is George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh’s *Jocasta*, a version of Euripides’s *Phoenician Women*, the first Greek play to be translated into English. The authors do certainly purport to be translating Euripides – their title reads, “Iocasta: A Tragedie writte in Greeke by Euripides. Translated and digested into Acte, by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh . . .”, though in fact they are working quite faithfully from a recent Italian version by Lodovico Dolce.

Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh do not follow Dolce in one respect: Dolce says nothing whatever about Euripides – his *Giocasta* purports to be his own, though he acknowledges in a dedication that he has taken “le inventioni, le sentenze, e la testura” (the texture, the general feel) from the ancients, “dagli antichi” (1566, A2r). In fact, Dolce’s indebtedness is far more complex than the English translators’, and Euripides comes to him through several intermediaries. Dolce’s Latin was fluent, but he knew little Greek. He used a recent Latin translation of *The Phoenician Women*, and his *Giocasta* is a free version of the play, omitting scenes and adding others, heavily reliant on Seneca’s *Phoenissae*.⁷ And while a fulsome dedication praises his patron’s knowledge of Greek and Latin, there is no suggestion that he will recognise in *Giocasta* Euripides’s (or Seneca’s) *Phoenician Women*.

Perhaps all this implies is that Italian humanism felt more at home with the ancients than the British latecomers did, saw

⁷ I have paraphrased the account by Papadopoulou 2008, 118.

themselves as part of a continuous tradition, and therefore more free to adapt and appropriate the classics. But by the end of the century, English writers like Marlowe, Chapman and Jonson (to say nothing of such programmatic classicists as William Gager and Thomas Watson) were quite at home with the ancient models, and not at all constrained by them – think of *Hero and Leander*. There probably were people as good at ancient Greek as Marlowe, but surely nobody had so much fun with it. But most Renaissance classicists worked the way Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh did, making use of translations and modern paraphrases to gain access to the ancient texts.

Our attitude towards that freedom has been on the whole condescending – we prize originality, and plagiarism has been a favourite charge of modern scholars against Renaissance classicism. Modern critics are usually willing to allow Renaissance authors their sources provided they are sufficiently ancient. If Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh had gone to Seneca for *Jocasta*, rather than to Lodovico Dolce, the fact probably wouldn't have been a strike against them. Even with classical sources, however, the idea of intermediate texts disturbs us. Here's a single example: E.W. Talbert, a scholar of Renaissance reference works, discovered that Ben Jonson's learned marginal annotations, such as those to *The Masque of Queens* and *Sejanus*, are often copied directly from dictionaries and encyclopedias. Talbert felt that Jonson's learning was thereby impugned. He accused the poet of lying when he claims, in the dedicatory epistle to the masque, that he wrote the work "out of the fullness and memory of my former readings".⁸ To anyone who knew anything about Jonson, the accusation was nonsense – dozens of Greek and Latin texts from Jonson's library survive, with copious annotations in Jonson's hand; but as a poet constantly short of cash, he repeatedly sold off his books. When necessary, he used whatever reference works were available, including dictionaries and encyclopedias. Every age has its reference books, and a more

⁸ Talbert 1947; see also the earlier article (1943). The argument was called to account by Percy Simpson in *Ben Jonson* 1925-52, 10.640. Talbert implicitly recants in Starnes and Talbert 1955, 212; but see the amusingly self-defensive piece of scholarly gobbledygook in 432n69.

scrupulous generation than ours may criticise us for failing to acknowledge our use of bibliographies and periodical indexes – to say nothing of Google and Wikipedia – as if we were thereby pretending to carry all the relevant scholarship in our heads.

England at the turn of the century, the England of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, was increasingly imbued with the classics – even visually, as aristocrats began adding colonnades to their houses (not always very effectively, as in the lumpish example at Hardwick Hall in Figure 6, built in the 1590s for the formidable Bess of Shrewsbury), and churches began to look like Roman temples – Figure 7 is Wenceslas Hollar’s view of St Paul’s Covent Garden, designed by Inigo Jones. Books adopted the typography of Roman inscriptions for their dedications, as in Figures 8 and 9. But the classical model was endlessly various: in the space of four or five years Shakespeare’s version of Rome moved from “a wilderness of tigers” in *Titus Andronicus* to the controlled rhetoric of *Julius Caesar*; his version of the *Menaechmi* moved from the slapstick of *The Comedy of Errors* to the poetic passion of *Twelfth Night*. Just as Renaissance Latin was a vernacular, the classical style was a mode of expression, based not on a set of rules, but on a repertory of infinitely adaptable models.

Consider, in conclusion, the astonishing remnant of the Peacham drawing of *Titus Andronicus*, the only surviving drawing of a Shakespeare play from Shakespeare’s lifetime.⁹ It looks like a scene from the play, but in fact it combines a number of actions, and gives a conspectus or epitome of the play as a whole – it is accompanied by a text that combines material from acts 1 and 5. This drawing is not an eye-witness sketch of Shakespeare on the stage; but it shows how a contemporary imagined Shakespeare in action, and is certainly informed by a theatregoer’s experience. The costumes seem to us a hodgepodge, but they indicate the characters’ roles, their relation to each other, and most important, their relation to us. A few elements are included to suggest the classical setting, but there is no attempt to mirror a world or recreate a historical moment. There’s a Roman general at the centre, a medieval queen,

⁹ Frequently reproduced; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peacham_drawing.



Fig. 6: Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire. Public domain photo



Fig. 7: Wenceslaus Hollar, Saint Paul's Covent Garden designed by Inigo Jones, c. 1647. Private Collection



Fig. 8: Late Roman inscription. Author's photograph

TO. THE. ONLIE. BEGETTER. OF.
 THESE. IN SVING. SONNETS.
 M^r. W. H. ALL. HAPPINESSE.
 AND. THAT. ETERNITIE.
 PROMISED.
 BY.
 OVR. EVER-LIVING. POET.
 WISHETH.
 THE. WELL-WISHING.
 ADVENTVRER. IN.
 SETTING.
 FORTH.
 T. T.

Fig. 9: Dedication page of *Shake-Spears Sonnets* (1609).
 Folger Shakespeare Library.

two prisoners and their guard in outfits that are a mixture of Roman and Elizabethan; and the soldiers on the left are entirely modern.

The anachronistic details serve as our guides, accounting for the figures and locating them in relation to our world. We are always told that the Renaissance stage performed history as if it were contemporary, but an image such as this renders the claim untenable. On the contrary, the drawing provides a good index to the limitations on the imagination of otherness. Our sense of the other depends on our sense of its relation to ourselves; we understand it in so far as it differs from us, and conversely, we know ourselves through comparison and contrast, through a knowledge of what we are not – we construct the other as a way of affirming the self. The anachronisms here (and, indeed, throughout Shakespeare's drama), far from being incidental or inept, are essential; they are what locate us in history. The meaningful re-creation of the past requires the semiotics of the present. Anachronism is essential to the very notion of historical relevance itself, which assumes that the past speaks to, and is in some way a version of, the present. Sometimes it was a threatening version: hence Jonson's arrest over *Sejanus*, the suppression of the deposition scene in *Richard II*, the banning of John Hayward's *History of Henry the Fourth*. Nothing in the past is safely in the past, and the dark side of how productive classical models were was how dangerously pertinent they could also be.

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The Elizabethan *Bacchae*

Euripides's *Bacchae*, with its antic hero and celebration of the joys of revenge, would seem to be especially relevant to Elizabethan drama, an ancestor of *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Hamlet*. In fact, however, it seems to have been practically unknown to the Elizabethans. With the new ProQuest version of EEBO (Early English Books Online) it is now possible to search early English books for specific references; so I paired the name Euripides with books printed in England before 1640 to see what came up. I got 474 hits. Many of these, of course, were duplicates, appearing in works that were issued in multiple editions — the actual figure, however, was still something over 300. Most of those, however, were cases in which Euripides's name simply appears in a list of famous ancient authors. Citations which actually quoted Euripides for the most part indicated no knowledge of the work cited, but were only bits of wisdom that might have come from any of the multitude of collections of aphorisms and moral stories throughout the period.

There was only one English edition of a play of Euripides in Greek, *The Trojan Women*, published by John Day in 1575 — continental editions were, of course, easily obtainable, but it must be to the point that English publishers did not see a sufficient market to produce them domestically; and there were no subsequent editions of Day's *Trojan Women*. As for *The Bacchae*, I found only a single case where I believe it is being cited, and in a context, moreover, that indicates some familiarity with the play. John Bishop's *Beautiful Blossoms*, a collection of historical anecdotes published in 1577, recounting the history of Demetrius, king of Macedonia, says, "Then fled *Demetrius* unto *Thebes*, where one scoffingly applied vnto him that verse of *Euripides*: he came vnto the *Dyrcean* springs, and *Ismenus*, his divine and goodly fourme and shape being chaunged in to a

mortall” (Byshop 1577, 97v). This is a version of a bit of Dionysus’s opening speech, “I am here at the springs of Dirce, the river Ismenos, / Changing my shape from divine to mortal . . .” (1994, 4-5). There is no reason to assume that John Bishop (about whom I can learn nothing) knew the play, but he is certainly citing someone who did.

The play, then, to the Elizabethans was either practically unknown or deliberately ignored. It was not translated into English until the 1780s, and then two translations were published within a year of each other — for the English, it was an enlightenment and romantic text. Schlegel’s *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (delivered 1806, published 1846) and Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* (1872) were the works that established *The Bacchae* as the quintessential Greek tragedy, though for Nietzsche, ironically, the two destroyers of the Greek tragic sense, the two great cultural villains, were Euripides the ironist and Socrates the arch-rationalist. But Nietzsche sees Euripides, at the end of his life, having a major change of heart, realising that Dionysus was simply too powerful to be expunged from art and society; and *The Bacchae* was thus the fullest expression of this tragic truth.

The problems with this argument are manifold: Euripides the ironist is quite evident in *The Bacchae*, so it hardly represents a change of heart; and the claims of the irrational are fully present in his earlier plays, for example, in *Hippolytus*, where all the poetic energy is in expressing the uncontrollable violence of passion, and the virtues of morality and self-control are meagre indeed. The essay was soundly refuted in its own time, and Nietzsche withdrew and recanted it. Its celebrity is a modern phenomenon: whatever its historical defects, it speaks to the dangerous attractions of unreason.

There is a perverse element in Nietzsche’s argument, too: Dionysus, as the embodiment of revelry, is surely as essential to comedy as to tragedy; and one could press this further. At the end of *The Symposium*, Socrates tells Agathon and Aristophanes, tragic and comic dramatists, that their arts (or crafts: the word is *technē*) are essentially the same. Heavy weather has been made of this — obviously Socrates was not recommending that Aristophanes start writing tragedies — but if we think of a dramatist like Ben Jonson, for whom scheming and deception are the essence of both comedy and tragedy, the two genres are more complements than opposites.

That Jonson was better at comedy hardly needs to be argued; but the fact that *Sejanus* and *Catiline* were not popular successes is surely not the final word about them, or about the validity of Jonson's sense of tragedy. And it has often been observed that tragedies like *Othello* and *Richard III* have the structure of comedies.

While in *The Bacchae* it is natural to focus on the final violent destruction of the rationalist Pentheus, and think of it as a tragedy of revenge and dismemberment, like *Thyestes* or *Titus Andronicus*, it is also a tragedy of romantic ecstasy, comic deception, and transvestite disguise. It is thus prototypical – not a source: the play was unknown to the Elizabethans; but one might think of it as an archetype. Certainly Elizabethan dramatists often thought like Euripides. It is a prototype of the tragedy of Romeo but also of the comedy of Falstaff (the most complete acolyte of Dionysus in Shakespeare, who is also forced, like Pentheus, into a transvestite disguise); of the comedy of Rosalind and Orlando as well as the tragedy of Iago; of *Twelfth Night* as well as *The Spanish Tragedy*; or, for that matter, a prototype of all those comedies in which irresistible men drive women insane (*The Taming of the Shrew*; *All's Well That Ends Well*; *Dom Juan*), or in which women are initially men's agents, but end as menacing and controlling (*The Merchant of Venice*). Surely one theme of *The Bacchae* is the dangerous independence of women: to be controlled by Dionysus is to be uncontrollable by anyone else. His power, moreover, ultimately enables them to act independently – in another myth, the murder and beheading of Orpheus by bacchae is not mandated by Dionysus; quite the contrary. Orpheus has not offended the god, he has offended women.

What we enjoy about tragedy is not confined to that purgation which, for Aristotle, defines it, however we want to understand *catharsis*. In many tragedies, in fact, we identify with the villains, watch them with fascination and even cheer them on – thus Mary Lefkowitz and James Romm, in their introduction to *The Bacchae*, point to Dionysus's "mixture of mischievousness, malevolence, and adolescent brashness", which make him an irresistible protagonist (2016, 739). Mischievousness, malevolence, and adolescent brashness hardly describe what we think of as the traditional tragic hero, but they do describe a figure central to a number of tragedies – *Hamlet*, for example, or *Tamburlaine*. The dramatically fascinating hero-

villain figure is not limited to obvious cases like Richard III and Iago; it is central to both of Ben Jonson's tragedies, but it is also central to Jonsonian comedy — that is, this figure is as much comic as tragic.

Consider the Dionysian Hamlet. This is an element of the play that tends to be eliminated from modern productions, in the interests of making Hamlet a contemplative philosopher. He *is* a contemplative philosopher, but only intermittently, between bouts of antic disruptiveness; and the disruptive antics really are essential to the play — they are what frightens Claudius about Hamlet, not his philosophical musings.

The Gloucester plot in *King Lear*, despite its grisly blinding scene, includes much that is essentially comic: not only the fool, but also the deceptions of Edmund the classic machiavel, the mad scenes of Edgar as Poor Tom, and the little staged parodic tragedy of the fall from Dover Cliff. All this was added to the Lear story by Shakespeare — something about the tragic plot required comedy. And even the blinding scene, surely the most horrific scene invented by Shakespeare, paralleled only by what is inflicted on Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* (and that takes place offstage and is only described), is in fact, in its cultural setting, not unique at all; and though it is horrifying, it is surely not there to evoke revulsion — the point was not to drive outraged spectators from the theatre. The pamphlets of the period are full of explicit accounts of horrible tortures inflicted on prisoners; and indeed, executions, sometimes involving drawing and quartering or burning alive, were a species of popular entertainment. Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" *Actes and Monuments*, with its ghastly accounts of the sufferings of Protestant heroes, adorned with ghastly woodcuts, was a continual best seller throughout the age, and not only for its devotional matter — indeed, the devotional and the lurid are inseparable in this text, aspects of each other. Lurid accounts of torture and death appealed to a strong popular taste.

It may be that tastes have changed somewhat in this respect, though they certainly haven't changed so much that we can't see the point. S&M is, after all, still very much in fashion, and sadism is increasingly a staple of popular movies. Perhaps the point of the blinding scene is just the opposite of the one we try to get out of it: we have been horrified at the treatment of the good people by the

bad people, outraged by the villainy of the villainous, but suddenly here is a scene that puts us firmly in collusion with the villains — this is the scene that gives Shakespeare's audience what they really like, the pleasures of torture and mutilation with a good moral context to boot. Samuel Johnson, in fact, saw the scene as an instance of Shakespeare catering to popular taste: "Let it be remembered that our authour well knew what would please the audience for which he wrote" (1793, 14.302).

So how bad are Cornwall and Regan? Just about as bad as we are — they are doing it, after all, for our entertainment. The folio's one revision to the quarto version of the scene, deleting the pitying and moralising servants, seems designed to emphasise our complicity, to keep us focused on the Theater of Cruelty, not to introduce a surrogate pity to detach us from the action. The scene, moreover, cannot be accounted for as an indication of the savagery of early modern taste, because though commentators have been universally appalled by it, few revisers, and none till the mid-nineteenth century, found a way of doing without it. Not only Nahum Tate (perpetrator of the notorious happy ending), but even George Colman at the end of the eighteenth century says he could not think of a way of cutting it and maintaining the plot. Whatever else it is, it has seemed both structurally essential and a necessary principle of explanation. Still, it is hard to see the resistance to moving the blinding itself offstage as anything but disingenuous. The scene is simply too powerful a piece of theatre for the performing tradition to abandon it.

Dionysus is hero and god, but Dionysian power is not represented as a good thing in *The Bacchae*. Pentheus's mother and aunt, after all, are not guilty of Pentheus's sin. They have doubted the divinity of Semele's son, but the only thing Dionysus has done to convince them of it (and they are certainly convinced) leads to their destruction. How do you know whether a charming stranger who claims to be a god really is one? For us 2500 years later, the history of false messiahs is surely a sufficient argument for scepticism — was there no argument for scepticism in Euripides's time? Perhaps the answer is that indeed there was not, at least for an audience at a celebration of Dionysus. But the case is hardly clear: Euripides is an ironist. Pentheus is destroyed, but so is his whole family, even Cadmus, Dionysus's grandfather, who has established the shrine

to Dionysus's mother Semele — within the play itself this outcome is represented as unjust. If there is a moral, it is not simply how dangerous it is to offend a god, but even more deeply, how difficult it is to avoid it. Surely this is not an affirmation of the benefits of admitting the irrational into society; it is a recognition of how destructive the irrational is, and also of how much a part of human existence it is. The most beautiful thing, the chorus assures us twice (the lines are repeated), is not music or dance or ecstatic poetry, all those things the god inspires and promotes, but *vengeance*, “holding our hands/ above the fallen enemy”. Dionysus hasn't come to Thebes proposing to establish a theatre festival.

As the god is presented, he is all too human: he has all the human failings, but being a god, doesn't suffer for them. What he wants is first revenge — he has been slandered, accused of being not a god but merely the child of his mother's adultery. But he wants more than legitimacy, he wants to be acknowledged as a god, to be worshipped. It isn't enough simply to be a god, simply to know you're a god, to be immortal, to have all the powers he exercises throughout the play, to make people delirious with happiness or drive them crazy, change his shape, create earthquakes, free yourself from chains, to be simply all-powerful. Like any petty tyrant, he wants to be *acknowledged* to be all-powerful; and not simply acknowledged, because he has many followers, but *universally* acknowledged. Why do gods require worshippers? This god, ironically, is all-powerful, but not at all self-sufficient.

Dionysus enjoys playing with Pentheus, teasing and deluding him — the two figures are, in character, complements and opposites, though they certainly are not equally matched. Of course an audience of spectators at a festival dedicated to Dionysus isn't going to take Pentheus's side — the play celebrates a victory that was long ago decisively won. But suppose the case weren't loaded: suppose the rationalist Pentheus hadn't been presented simply as pig-headed, brash, in the fullest sense immature, and moreover unable to contain his own impulses toward Bacchic experience (think of the ease with which Dionysus gets him to play the woman, and his pleasure in doing so); and suppose the god hadn't been presented simply as vindictive, mischievous and malevolent. Could there be such a play? Surely one can argue the rival claims of reason and aesthetics.

Socrates's argument justifying the banishment of poetry from the ideal commonwealth surely is worth taking seriously enough to argue against it. Socrates really can't be confuted simply by calling him a pig-headed transvestite — and the reasoned refutation offered in Aristotle's *Poetics* has, needless to say, turned out to be much more influential.

Renaissance readings of Euripides tended to ignore or suppress the plays' ironic dimension in the interest of accommodating them to Christian values. Thus Melanchton's influential *Cohortatio* (1545, often reprinted) interpreted all Greek tragedy as teaching one universal truth, expressed in *Aeneid* 6.620 "Learn Justice and not to scorn the gods" (see Lurie 2012, 443). Caspar Stiblin, in his edition of Euripides (Basel, 1562), writes of *The Bacchae*:

The poet, therefore, with this play, in which Pentheus suffers punishment for his stupid obstinance and impiety, wished to exhort the men of his age to cultivate piety: when this is neglected, in its place come impiety, heedlessness, self-will and other diseases of the same type which subvert republics. Nor does he do this in a covert way, since he says "I believe the finest thing is to be of sound and modest mind and to revere the gods and their laws, etc." Similarly around the end of Act 5:

If there is anyone who scorns the gods,
Let him look at this man's death and believe in them, etc.

For as piety (according to Cicero) is the basis of every virtue, thus the destruction of religion is the root of all evils.¹

From where we stand, this certainly does not seem to be Euripides's point. Stiblin's example is egregiously decontextualised: the lines he cites are spoken not by the Chorus, but by Cadmus, the one pious member of the clan, founder of Semele's shrine, whose piety earns him nothing but exile and misery. But Euripides's point also doesn't seem to be Nietzsche's point, how essential the irrational is to civilised society. It seems to be just the opposite, a warning about

¹ The translation is by Robert Mastronarde. See <https://ucbclassics.dreamhosters.com/djm/stiblinus/stiblinusMain.html>, accessed 18.01.2020. I am indebted to Robert Miola for these references.

how destructive unreason is unless it is contained, and how difficult it is to contain it. In this view, Euripides the ironist is not recanting at all, but utterly unrepentant. What is left of Thebes after the destruction of Pentheus and the whole race of Cadmus? At the end, Dionysus leaves us in a world not of music and art, but in a world of rubble, death, and (literally) disillusion. Given the play's conclusion, one would say that Pentheus's attempt to exclude Dionysus and his bacchae was entirely justified — the point about invading barbarians is surely that they're barbarians. Compare Shakespeare at the end of *Coriolanus*, a play full of staggeringly beautiful poetry that ends in nothing but destruction and despair. An anonymous Second Lord offers no moral: "Let's make the best of it".

As *King Lear* draws to its disastrous conclusion, Edgar, the good son, says to his wicked brother as he is about to defeat and kill him in a duel, "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices/ Make instruments to plague us". It is a singularly unapt summation of the play's tragic action, revealing Edgar's naiveté rather than anything about the moral structure of the play's world. Edgar's blind and desolate father sums up the play in a way that seems much truer to the action: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods:/ They kill us for their sport". There is surely no sense in *King Lear* that the gods are just, that we get what we deserve — the god that Gloucester recognises is Euripides's Dionysus.

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PART 4
Elizabethan Italy

Devils Incarnate

My title refers to Roger Ascham's famous aphorism, that Italians are wicked, but the Italianate Englishman is the devil incarnate; and I begin with two obviously Italianate Englishmen, Inigo Jones and Ben Jonson. In 1613 and 1614 Jones accompanied the Earl and Countess of Arundel on a trip to Italy, serving as their cultural guide and interpreter – his qualifications were primarily in his aesthetic expertise, though he also knew the country, having spent some time in Italy a decade earlier. His sketch book from the Arundel trip survives, a fascinating record of an English artist teaching himself to be Italianate. To compare the Jones of the first decade of the seventeenth century, doing designs for court entertainments, with a page of the sketch book, shows him learning not only a style but how to make a sketch book that looks Italian (so it includes a couple of examples of older men leering at attractive youths, an exemplary case for the English of the Italian devil incarnate). Jonson, at his most acerbic in the quarrel with Jones, calls him *Iniquo*. The pun is particularly insulting precisely because it is Italian.

On a practical level, what did it mean for Jones to be Italianate? His architectural practice is generally described as classicising, but the classical in Queen's House, Greenwich, or in the Whitehall Banqueting House, is obviously learned less from the classical Vitruvius than from the contemporary Alberti, Serlio and Michelangelo, and in any case, certainly not from any Roman remains. Jones's Italian classicism also included a great deal of hybridisation, the Italian grafted onto the English, sometimes perforce, as in the new west façade he erected on old St Paul's cathedral; but sometimes by design, as in the setting for Oberon's palace, in Jonson's masque *Oberon*, performed in 1611. Whether one considers the Italian elements here a refinement or a corruption

will depend not only on one's taste, but on which side one took in the current debate over British history – whether Britain was authentically Roman because it was founded by the legendary Brutus, grandson of Aeneas; or whether the Romans were, on the contrary, not ancestors to be revered but aliens and invaders, oppressors rather than civilisers. Jones's treatise on Stonehenge declares Jones's position quite clearly: the ancient British monument is a Roman temple dedicated to Coelus, and preserves the most basic of the classical architectural orders, the Tuscan – the ancient Italian style is, for Jones, more quintessentially classical than the standard Greek orders of architectural classicism, Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. By his return from the Arundel trip, his stage designs have taken the Serlian models completely to heart. This is a style that Jones has clearly made his own.

The Italianate Jonson is, obviously, more directly classical – Jonson's Italy is the Italy of Martial, Horace, Terence, not least, of course, because he had never been there – but his masques show a clear awareness of recent Florentine models, possibly derived from the returning traveler Inigo Jones. The visual arts, however, provide Jonson with a touchstone for the taste that he craves as much as the diabolical Iniquo. "The pen", Jonson wrote in his commonplace book *Discoveries*, "is more noble than the pencil; for that can speak to the understanding, the other, but to the sense" (Jonson 2012, 7.550, 1077-9). The invidious comparison here is between the written word and pictorial art; but the synecdoche itself shades the two into each other: Inigo Jones did his drawings in pen and ink, while the books that survive from Jonson's library include many with marginalia in pencil – the instrument of Jones's invention was the pen, that of Jonson's understanding the pencil. In fact, the passage, *Poesis et pictura*, goes on to praise picture more highly than poetry. It is "the invention of heaven: the most ancient, and most akin to nature". The two arts, moreover, are indissolubly linked, just as sense and understanding are; and "whosoever loves not picture is injurious to truth, and all the wisdom of poetry" (1083-4).

But what pictures does Jonson have in mind? Many of them are certainly, if not fictitious, at least exclusively textual, such as those lost masterpieces of Apelles and Zeuxis described by Pliny, or Philostratus's gallery of *Icones*. Jonson's sense of modern

masterworks similarly derives from descriptions and catalogues – it is unlikely that he read Vasari, though he certainly knew people who did; but his account of ancient and modern painting comes quite directly from Antonio Possevino's *Bibliotheca Selecta*, published in 1593, a guide to the history of the arts and sciences. *Discoveries* is, after all, a collection of authoritative opinions; but the authority behind them is rarely Jonson's. In this sense, his praise of picture is a praise of ekphrasis, and the pen and the pencil are one.

In a peculiarly indicative passage Jonson cites a list of the best artists of his own time, "six famous painters who were excellent, and emulous of the Ancients" (Jonson 2012, 7.553, 1124-5). The six are in fact seven: Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, Correggio, Sebastiano del Piombo, Giulio Romano and Andrea del Sarto. The list – including the erroneous number – is copied from Possevino, who in turn is copying G. B. Armenini's *De' Veri Precetti della Pittura* (1586), and the slip in the numbering suggests that Possevino's sense of painting is no less textual than Jonson's: Armenini in fact names eight excellent artists, and implies that there are many more; his list starts with Leonardo, who is his benchmark, includes the seven cited by Jonson, and concludes with "molti altri". Possevino, however, translating the passage into Latin, streamlines Titian's name as it appears in Armenini, "Titian da Cadore", (i.e., from his birthplace, Cadore) to simply "Titiano", and omits the comma between him and "Antonio Corrigiensi", making Titian and Correggio appear to be a single artist, Titiano Antonio Corrigiensi – though they would appear so, obviously, only to someone who had never heard of Correggio and knew too little about Titian to know his full name. This, therefore, must be the case with Possevino, unlikely as it would seem in a late sixteenth-century Italian Jesuit writing a handbook of the arts. Jonson, on the other hand, clearly knows that Titian is not Correggio, because he re-inserts the comma; but he still follows Possevino in numbering the seven great painters six. Authority is not to be lightly rejected.

What visual experience is there behind this textual praise of painting? What pictures would Jonson have seen? Not, certainly, many originals by the artists on his list – though also not necessarily none. The collecting instinct was starting to burgeon in England. The Earl of Leicester was said to have owned some Venetian paintings,

though there is no record of what they were, and Sir Philip Sidney knew enough to sit for Veronese when he was in Venice, though the portrait's recipient, his friend Hubert Languet, was not happy with the result, and the picture has since disappeared. Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, Jonson's patron on more than one occasion, was a notable connoisseur (he was furnishing Hatfield House), and owned works by both Italian and Netherlandish artists, as did two other patrons of Jonson's, the Earl of Somerset and the Duke of Buckingham. Prince Henry, under Salisbury's guidance, became a passionate collector of paintings and bronzes. The Earl and Countess of Arundel formed the greatest art collection in Jacobean England, and acquired works by Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael, Giulio Romano and Annibale Carracci to display beside their inherited Holbeins.

There was, in fact, a good deal of information circulating in Jonson's England about who were the right artists to admire and invest in – Possevino would have been, for Jonson, at most a convenience. Richard Haydocke, translator of Paolo Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'Arte della Pittura*, published in English in 1598 as *A Tracte conteining the Artes of Curious Painting*, noted "many noblemen then furnishing their houses with the excellent monuments of sundry famous and ancient masters, both Italian and German" (Haydocke 1598, 6) – it is perhaps indicative of how essentially literary Jonson's sense of the artistic canon is that it includes only Italian names. But Jonson's best source of information, along with whatever entree he may have had to the works themselves, would certainly have been Inigo Jones, at least as long as they remained on friendly terms. Jones was by 1615 a genuine expert. Even before the Italian trip with the Arundels he was advising the Prince of Wales and the Earl of Rutland on artistic matters, and after his return his major clients, in addition to the Arundels, were Prince Charles and the Duke of Buckingham.

Still, whatever pictures Jonson saw, he mentions painters but no paintings. The only actual works he refers to by any of the artists he singles out for praise are Giulio Romano's notorious set of sexual positions, *I Modi*, which circulated as prints, accompanied by the salacious sonnets of Pietro Aretino. Lady Politic Would-Be uses them in *Volpone* to show off her familiarity with Italian culture: "But for a desperate wit, there's Aretine / Only his pictures

are a little obscene –” (3.4.96-70). If Jonson had left it there, this would be simply a joke at the expense of the expatriate nouveau-riche Englishwoman. But three scenes later the uxorious Corvino, who certainly knows his Italian pornographers, worries about “some young Frenchman, or hot Tuscan blood, / That had read Aretine, conned all his prints” (3.7.59-60). And five years later in *The Alchemist*, the world’s expert on pornographic painting Sir Epicure Mammon imagines his “oval room / Filled with such pictures as Tiberius took / From Elephantis, and dull Aretine / But coldly imitated” (2.2.43-4). Jonson, in short, seems to be under the impression that the pictures are by Aretino. Possibly Jonson had read the sonnets, which were easily available, but had not seen the prints, which were suppressed; nevertheless, turning Aretino into a visual artist and eliding Giulio Romano is surely the most complete triumph of ekphrasis the Renaissance offers.

Ignorance is, of course, no impediment to the deployment of artistic allusion. Giulio Romano is, notoriously, the only modern artist named by Shakespeare, who knew so little about him that he made him a sculptor, the creator of Hermione’s lifelike statue in *The Winter’s Tale*. Giulio did no sculptures; but the name of the great artist alone is sufficient to establish Paulina’s (or Shakespeare’s) credentials as a connoisseur. Jonson’s list of names from Possevino would doubtless have been similarly sufficient to certify Jonson’s expertise – even, perhaps (since *Discoveries* is his own commonplace book), to certify it to himself.

I pause over this only because Jonson’s praise of “picture” is so genuinely magnanimous, but at the same time so relentlessly unspecific. For comparison, Donne, in “The Storm”, reveals an equally unspecific but nevertheless much more direct knowledge of contemporary painting:

... a hand or eye
 By Hilliard drawn, is worth an history
 By a worse painter made. . . .
 (3-5)

The engraved frontispiece portrait of Donne in the 1635 *Poems* is apparently based on a lost Hilliard miniature, and a superb Isaac

Oliver portrait of Donne survives; I have discussed the iconography of the Donne portraits in the essay “Not His Picture But His Book”, (Orgel 2011, 194-210). Donne and Jonson were close friends, and Oliver was Jonson’s neighbour when both lived in Blackfriars. The three must have known each other. But, as I observe in the essay, they seem not to have inhabited the same cultural world. Jonson had no interest in investing his immortality in the visual arts, and admonished the reader of Shakespeare’s works in the 1623 first folio to “look/ Not on his picture, but his book” (9-10).

Let us return now to the invocation of Giulio Romano in *The Winter’s Tale* to create the surpassingly lifelike statue of the late queen Hermione, commissioned by the noble Paulina, connoisseur and architect of the play’s reconciliations. In the final scene, the statue is revealed, and brought to life. The invocation of Giulio Romano is striking for a number of reasons: this is the only allusion in Shakespeare to a modern artist and, indeed, one of the earliest references to Giulio in England – Shakespeare here, as nowhere else, appears to be in touch with the avant-garde of the visual arts. But Giulio was not a sculptor, and in fact the name is all the play gives us – as it turns out, there is no statue; the figure Paulina unveils is the living queen.

The relation between art and life is particularly direct here, and the ability of the great artist to restore the losses of the past and reconcile the present to them is represented as axiomatic. But the name of the artist is essential, the name of an artist renowned for his skill at producing the illusion of life; and a modern artist, moreover, not a historical figure like Phidias or Zeuxis, who might be expected to be supplying art treasures in ancient Sicily, where *The Winter’s Tale* is set. The formidable model for Paulina is surely the Countess of Arundel. She and the Earl formed the greatest collection of art works in Jacobean England. They owned, indeed, a number of Giulio’s drawings, including preparatory sketches for the luxuriantly lifelike frescos at the Palazzo Tè, though these had not been acquired by 1610.

English collectors in the first decade of the seventeenth century began for the first time to be serious connoisseurs, dispatching experts to the continent to buy for them, and concerned with acquiring expertise of their own. On the continent conspicuous

collections of great art had for more than a century been an attribute of princely magnificence, and Henry VIII had to some extent undertaken to emulate his contemporaries Francis I and Charles V in this respect: there were no Titians in the Tudor royal gallery, but the Holbeins and Torrigianos suggest a very high standard of artistic taste. The taste, however, was obviously not genetic: Queen Mary's court painter was Antonio Mor, not a bad choice, but hardly in the league of Holbein; and neither Elizabeth nor James had much interest in the arts as such, nor had they any interest whatever in increasing the royal collection. James's son Henry, Prince of Wales, promised to change all that.

Prince Henry seems to have been introduced to connoisseurship around 1610, when he was sixteen, by Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, and Arundel. Cecil already had a notable collection, and at Henry's request he sent a group of paintings for the prince's attention; it went without saying that one of them would remain with the prince as a gift to form the nucleus of a royal collection that would stamp this prince as a true Renaissance monarch. Cecil was to accompany the pictures and expound their merits (and presumably ensure that Henry chose the right one to keep with the earl's compliments). The painting Cecil gave the prince was Palma Giovane's *Prometheus Chained to the Rock*.¹ It had been acquired for him in 1608 by Sir Henry Wotton, the English ambassador in Venice. This is a painting that is not much regarded now, and it is rather grim. Nevertheless, it really can be considered one of the foundational works of English artistic taste, a touchstone that almost by itself established the market for Venetian painting in England. Wotton, indeed, had sent it to Cecil in the first place in order to establish his own credentials as an artistic agent and broker. Palma's *Prometheus* was the work that made everyone want big dramatic Venetian paintings, not just Palmas, but the bigger (and more expensive) names: Titians, Veroneses, Tintoretts. Thereafter it was made clear that gentlemen desiring Prince Henry's favor could do no better than give him paintings.

The prince's own taste, insofar as one can judge it, was eclectic, voracious, and, it has to be admitted, relatively uninformed. The

¹ The painting was also referred to as *Tityus*, and may be found catalogued under either title.

largest purchases were Dutch and Flemish, but that was only because the market was closer and the agents more familiar: he was in fact the first large purchaser of Venetian paintings in England. When he asks for gifts from continental princes eager to curry favor with the next king of England, the requests are little short of megalomaniac: not merely miniature bronzes by Giambologna – in response he received a number of miniature *copies* of Giambologna statues – but even the *Rape of the Sabines* in the Piazza Signoria in Florence, and a Michelangelo ceiling from the Palazzo Medici in Siena. (There is neither a Michelangelo ceiling nor a Palazzo Medici in Siena, so in this case a refusal was easy). He also asked for and was sent portraits of illustrious men, such as had graced the royal gallery of Cosimo de' Medici (being a Renaissance prince meant imitating the lifestyles of the rich and famous); scenes of famous battles both on land and sea, night pieces, exercises in perspective and *trompe l'oeil* combining art with the new science of optics; even scientific instruments themselves were included, for example a model of a perpetual motion machine constructed by the Prince's resident magus Cornelius Drebbel (it worked by changes in barometric pressure, and was somehow supposed to demonstrate the validity of the Ptolemaic system against the claims of Copernicus and Galileo). Indeed, the request for the miniatures and the Michelangelo ceiling was accompanied by further requests for a new type of magnet and the latest book by Galileo (was the prince unpersuaded by Drebbel's machine?), as well as for the plans of Michelangelo's staircase in the Laurentian library in Florence, and the formula for a new cement capable of sealing pipes so that they could carry water uphill without leaking. The art gallery was also to be a historical and scientific museum, a cabinet of wonders, perhaps most of all an architectural masterpiece including elaborate fountains and waterworks.

The Arundels' own collection was less eclectic than Prince Henry's, but here again, it was not simply a reflection of the new connoisseurship, and despite the obvious pride expressed by the Earl and Countess in their treasures, the display was really not what we would call an art gallery. The Arundel Marbles seem to us the forerunners of the Elgin Marbles; but they looked quite different to contemporary observers. Arundel's protégé Henry Peacham, the

author of *The Compleat Gentleman*, praises the statues in terms that are indicative: there is nothing about ideal Greek bodies or perfect proportion or *contrapposto*; they bring the past to life – what they give the observer, he says, is “the pleasure of seeing and conversing with these old heroes . . .” As for Arundel House, Peacham calls it “the chief English scene of ancient inscriptions . . .” (1634, 110, 112). It is rather startling to us to take up John Selden’s book entitled *Marmora Arundelliana* and to find in it not depictions of the sculptures but pages of carved inscriptions. Peacham continues, “You shall find all the walls of the house inlaid with them and speaking Greek and Latin to you. The garden especially will afford you the pleasure of a world of learned lectures in this kind” (Selden 1629, 112). A world of learned lectures: the collecting passion was not simply aesthetic; it also involved a profound interest in recovering and preserving the past, an education in history; and, significantly, connoisseurship has become the essential mark of a gentleman, marked as much by his taste as by his lineage.

Such a claim involves quite a new notion of both gentleman and artist. In 1629, the year in which Selden published the *Marmora Arundelliana*, Rubens wrote from London to a friend in Paris of “the incredible quantity of excellent pictures, statues, and ancient inscriptions which are to be found in this Court” – notice how the inscriptions are mentioned in the same breath as the works of art. His highest praise was reserved for one of Arundel’s sculptures: “I confess that I have never seen anything in the world more rare, from the point of view of antiquity” (Magurn 1955, 320-1). As the last bit suggests, to collectors like Arundel and artists like Rubens, a primary value of the visual and plastic arts was their memorialising quality, their link to the past and the vision of permanence they implied. This is why Peacham emphasises the importance and rarity not only of the statues but of the inscriptions: they were an essential element of the artistic power of the past. The word established the significance, the authority, of classical imagery, and modern masterpieces, the work of Giambologna, Michelangelo, Rubens, existed in a direct continuum with the arts of Greece and Rome.

Here is a very clear example of the relation of the verbal and visual arts in the period. Arundel conceived his collection not simply as a private matter, treasures for his personal enjoyment, but

as an education in taste for the nation – as such, it would also serve, of course, as a monument to his own taste and magnificence. To this end he commissioned Wenceslas Hollar to produce etchings of the principal masterpieces, with a view to publishing a volume of them. One of the first that Hollar completed was a rather grisly scene from ancient history, *King Seleucis Ordering his Son's Eye to be Put Out*, after a sketch by Giulio Romano for a fresco in the Palazzo Te. The subject was a moral story about the perquisites and obligations of power – the son had committed adultery, the stipulated punishment for which was that the perpetrator's eyes were to be put out. The father, as king, could have repealed the sentence, but instead he chose merely to mitigate it by ordering that only one of his son's eyes be blinded. The etching could certainly have stood on its own, a record of an exemplary work by one of the greatest Renaissance history painters, but it comes accompanied with a set of inscriptions. First Henry Peacham moralises the scene in a Latin epigram which effectively suppresses the fact that the story is as much an instance of judicial nepotism as of justice tempered with mercy: one always had to be told how to take historical examples, which have an uncomfortable tendency to imply the wrong morals along with the right ones. Below this Hollar places a dedication to Arundel establishing all his credentials: his hereditary titles, his position as Earl Marshall, his Garter knighthood, the fact that he is the greatest amateur, collector and promoter of the visual arts in the world; and then establishing his own claims to artistic eminence: "This picture, first drawn by Giulio Romano" – notice how long it takes to get to the artist – "now preserved in Arundel House, and here engraved after the original, Wenceslas Hollar humbly dedicates and consecrates . . .", etc. The drawing comes accompanied with both a pedigree and an ethical commentary, a "learned lecture"; these are both essential to the picture.

Arundel's pictures served him as a species of validation, establishing not only his taste but his authority within his own history as well. Early in his career he began collecting Holbein portraits, of which a number had come to him by inheritance. Holbeins were very expensive in England at this time, as much for nationalistic reasons, the artist's record of Henry VIII and his court, as for his artistic excellence. But he had a particular connection

with the Arundels, having painted many of the Earl's ancestors, including the unfortunate Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, who had been executed for treason; so the expense was also undertaken to assemble a visible family history. It undeniably helped to establish the Earl's fame as a connoisseur – Arundel House contained over thirty Holbein oil portraits – but here again, the history was as important as the aesthetics, as the following story shows. In 1620 Cosimo de Medici II, the Duke of Florence, wrote requesting one of the Earl's Holbeins as a gift. He offered to send any of his own paintings in exchange. He was, he wrote, "passionately set upon having a work by this artist". Arundel dispatched a splendid portrait of Sir Richard Southwell, duly furnished with appropriate inscriptions praising the artist, memorialising the sitter, and identifying the donor and recipient connoisseurs by their coats of arms – once again, the inscriptions are essential.

Now for Arundel, the Southwell portrait was a piece of family history in the worst way: Southwell had been instrumental in the arrest and execution of the Earl of Surrey. If the decision to purge the art collection of an old enemy seems logical, however, this in fact was not Arundel's motive. He at once commissioned a copy of the painting, and it continued to hang among the ancestors Southwell had betrayed. However demonic the sitter, whatever else the painting was, it was family history. For Cosimo, on the other hand, it was both art and an index to his own power as a collector, and he hung it among the greatest treasures of the Uffizi, where it still resides.

After Prince Henry's death in 1612, Prince Charles inherited most of his brother's treasures, and, with the advice and encouragement of two of his father's favorites, Somerset and Buckingham (Charles and Arundel were on the whole not on good terms), added constantly to them, both by purchasing other collections and by commissioning paintings from the major artists of the day, most significantly Rubens and Van Dyck. Van Dyck did a triple portrait of him, prepared for Bernini: of course Charles wanted the greatest Italian sculptor to immortalise his head. The ironies are obvious; and the bust, destroyed in a fire at Whitehall in 1698, was no more immortal than its original. By the mid-1630s the Caroline royal pictures constituted one of the greatest art collections in the world. There was more in this acquisitive passion than aesthetics

and conspicuous consumption. Just as, in the sixteenth century, artists came increasingly to be considered not mere craftsmen but philosophers and sages (thus the greatest artist of the age is referred to, in the account of his funeral, as “the divine Michelangelo”), so increasingly in the period great art was felt, in a way that was at once pragmatic and quasi-mystical, to be a manifestation of the power and authority of its possessor. Great artists became essential to the developing concept of monarchy and to the idealisation of the increasingly watered-down aristocracy, to realise and deploy the imagery of legitimacy and greatness.

The extent to which the power of art became a practical reality in England at this time may be gauged by a brief comparison of two large royal expenditures. In 1627, in the midst of the long and disastrous war England waged with Spain and subsequently with France, the Duke of Buckingham led an expedition to relieve a trapped Huguenot garrison at La Rochelle. But his troops proved insufficient, and in urgent need of reinforcements and pay for the soldiers, he appealed to the king. Charles believed wholeheartedly in the cause, but money was difficult to find; after three weeks, £14,000 and 2000 additional troops were committed to the enterprise. These proved utterly inadequate, and Buckingham was forced to retreat ignominiously. Throughout this period, however, Charles was eagerly negotiating for the magnificent art collection of the Gonzaga Dukes of Mantua, which had recently come on the market, including Mantegna’s vast *Triumph of Caesar*, one of Charles’s most important artistic purchases, still in the royal collection. For this he paid, in 1627 and 1628, a total of £25,500. To this monarch, a royal gallery full of Italian masterpieces was worth far more than a successful army.

But to a generation of Britons, Charles himself was the devil incarnate – Milton compared him with the diabolical Richard III, and Milton’s Satan, with his ardent patronage of Mammon, shared Charles’s aesthetic tastes. One of Cromwell’s first acts upon declaring himself Lord Protector was to sell off the Titians, the most famous and valuable paintings in the royal collection, and thus purge the realm of this most visible evidence of Italian culture.

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Venice at the Globe

Elizabethan England viewed Venice as a model of an equitable society. William Thomas's *Historie of Italie*, published in 1549 under Edward VI, holds up Venice as a pattern for good government, not least in the ways it resembles England, with its impartial legal system, and its Great Council as a parallel to Parliament. Thomas's optimistic view of the fairness of the English system was not borne out under Mary Tudor, when he was implicated in Thomas Wyatt's rebellion and executed for sedition. But especially in the later years of Elizabeth's reign, when the succession remained unsettled and aristocratic republican ways of determining the future seemed increasingly attractive, the Venetian model as described by Thomas was often invoked for comparison. There is no evidence that Shakespeare had read Thomas's *Historie*, though he would certainly have known about it; but by the time he was writing *The Merchant of Venice* he may have read Lewes Lewkenor's *Commonwealth and Government of Venice* in manuscript – the book was published in 1599, but it was a translation of a 1549 Latin treatise by Gasparo Contarini. The influence of these works on Elizabethan and Jacobean England has been widely appreciated and well treated elsewhere.¹

Here I am concerned not with historical sources but with the way Venice is imagined for the English stage. Judging from the drama, if Venice is seen as a model for England, it is surely a very ambiguous one; and as a mirror, it primarily reflects England's fears and vices. For example, Portia's confounding of Shylock and rescue of Antonio is a dramatic climax in *The Merchant of Venice*, a triumph of both

¹ The classic historical studies are Bouwsma 1968 and Pocock 1975. For a more specific study of Thomas and Lewkenor in relation to Shakespeare and Jonson, see McPherson 1990.

romantic ingenuity and legal strategy; but neither Portia's methods nor her arguments would have passed muster in an Elizabethan court (to say nothing of a Venetian one), and later audiences have generally found the scene more disturbing than celebratory.

The Venice of Antonio and Shylock is a burgeoning early capitalist economy, a world of merchants, importers and exporters, investors, and those largely invisible but nevertheless essential figures who make the whole system work, the suppliers of risk capital, particularly money-lenders. Antonio's money comes from trade, Shylock's from what the Elizabethans pejoratively called usury, and we would call simply banking. Neither can prosper without the other, and the system requires both. Antonio claims there are moneylenders in Venice who charge no interest, but clearly none of them will deal with him: given his investment in Bassanio, he is obviously a bad risk. Shylock takes the risk – he is essential, both to the plot and to Antonio's and Bassanio's enterprise. His decision not to charge interest in this case is intended only as a way of ensuring future business from Antonio, another kind of investment. The people in this society who are not dependent on the system, who do not make their money but simply have it – the rich heiresses – live somewhere else. Significantly, the somewhere is a geographical fantasy, Belmont: the name is adopted from the source story in *Il Pecorone*, and it is the only invented place name in Shakespeare.

Ben Jonson's Venetian play *Volpone* is about a clever scoundrel who fleeces his equally unsavory associates by pretending he is dying, and persuading them that he will make one of them his heir. They each give him increasingly rich gifts in the hope of being confirmed as the favourite. Though the names – Volpone, Mosca, Corvino, Corbaccio, etc. – suggest a moralising beast-fable, this Venice is a thoroughly capitalistic world, full of merchants, investors, lawyers, notaries. Corbaccio, the "big crow", who disinherits his son in favour of Volpone, is a miser – in a capitalist economy, that is tantamount to being a thief. Only Corbaccio's son, the soldier Bonario, and Celia, the merchant Corvino's wife, are declared by their names to be human, humane, virtuous, in a world that allows them very little space. Even the miser is in his way an investor, risking his money in the interests of a significant return. Venice in the play is an object of envy to two English travelers: its obsessions

are parodied by Sir Politic Would-Be, who arrives full of impossibly grandiose moneymaking projects, and his wife, Lady Would-be, who is as grasping and flirtatious as any Venetian courtesan. The only disinterested voice is that of the one other English traveler, Peregrine, who stands outside the action as an amused observer of his compatriots' follies in pursuit of Italian vices – in effect, his voice is Jonson's.

The play opens with Volpone worshipping at the shrine of his gold. But where does Volpone's money come from? Jonson is quite explicit: his wealth does not derive from the mercantile economy in any way:

VOLPONE . . . I gain
 No common way; I use no trade, no venture;
 I wound no earth with plough-shares;
 . . . have no mills for iron,
 Oil, corn; or men to grind them into powder:
 . . .
 I turn no monies in the public bank,
 Nor usure private.
 . . .

(2012, 1.1.30-8)

and much more of the same sort of thing. As far as capitalism is concerned, Volpone is not involved. Why the insistence on this, with such specificity? When Stefan Zweig did his beautiful adaptation of the play in 1926,² he added a prologue to account both for where Volpone's money came from (imports and exports; one of his ships has just returned laden with riches) and for how he and Mosca know each other (they met in jail, while Volpone was briefly imprisoned for debt). These are matters which Jonson leaves significantly unexplained. Zweig's version humanises, rationalises and simplifies: it is an easier, nicer play. But Jonson's Volpone is not merely a very successful merchant. He does not make money, he gets people to give it to him. To produce money in the way Volpone boasts of doing, you have to start with money. The play insists, however, that Volpone's hands are clean; his money is the product of his wit, his

² Published as *Volpone, Eine Lieblose Komödie* (1926).

ingenious scheming – as Iago says of Roderigo in another Venice, “Thus do I ever make my fool my purse” (*Othello*, 1.3.375).

It cannot be irrelevant that the witty devising of plots is the source of the playwright Jonson’s income too. Volpone the master-manipulator is the heart of this comedy and the source of our pleasure in it. As an appreciative audience, we are just as surely implicated in his schemes as Jonson is; and in the dramatic economy, here as in Jonson’s even more popular play *The Alchemist*, no sympathy at all is elicited by the victims, who are by turns gullible and rapacious, and are represented as deserving what they get. The exceptions in *Volpone* are Celia and Bonario, but they serve more as foils than as agents. Bonario, the honest soldier, the man of action, is singularly ineffective; and all the play can offer Celia as a reward for her patience and virtue is to be sent home to her father with her dowry tripled, presumably only to find an even more covetous husband.

Volpone is all about money, and about using money to make more. Jonson’s fox is a scoundrel, but he is surely as much hero as villain – indeed, it is not clear that he is a villain at all. He is thoroughly amoral, certainly, but there is no suggestion that the gold he worships at the play’s opening is ill-gotten. Indeed, as we have seen, it is explicitly denied that he has even been touched by the necessary evils of trade. Nor has he anything against his victims, no scores to settle, no revenge to exact: he cons them for the pure pleasure of the game; he lays out the bait, and they take it willingly, eagerly. The bait is the promise of an inheritance, of being Volpone’s heir, being the surrogate son, brother, widow, the best beloved. In Jonson’s Venice, affection and family ties have a cash value; Corvino is willing to prostitute his wife to Volpone; Corbaccio to disinherit his son; Lady Politic Would-Be abandons her husband for Volpone. The purpose of these outrageous acts is precisely to prompt a reciprocal act of what in this society counts as love.

This is a world in which love is money. We could call it particularly Jonsonian because it is particularly blatant; but it is in fact no different from the Venice of Shakespeare’s merchants and lovers. At the opening of *The Merchant of Venice*, the first thing Bassanio says about Portia is that she is “a lady richly left”, and will be the means of getting him out of debt (1.2.161). Romance is doubtless an element, but the money is essential: however beautiful, witty or charming

Portia is, she is nothing to Bassanio, or to any of her other suitors, without her money. She is, moreover, curiously like Volpone, in that she is in no way implicated in the acquisition of her wealth – this is obviously a fundamental element in her attractiveness. She does not *make* her money, she *has* her money. Moreover, her father's will stipulates that for a suitor to fail in choosing the correct casket requires forswearing marriage entirely. This practically ensures that only desperate fortune-hunters will come to woo her: who else would take so great a risk; why else would Bassanio do it? There is a great deal of talk about love in the play, but money is always a part of it. When Jessica elopes with her lover Lorenzo, she comes to him with a box of Shylock's gold; and later Shylock is observed alternately lamenting his daughter and his ducats, unable to decide which loss he regrets more. Surely in this world, the two are not separable: daughters *are* ducats. Lorenzo does not woo Jessica in the expectation of being poor but happy, any more than Bassanio considers proposing to Portia that they forget about the caskets and just run away together.

Daughters are ducats not only in drama, but in the England of Shakespeare and Jonson too. Women are provided with dowries in early modern society because no one will marry them otherwise; daughters are their fathers' property, and, provided they are furnished with sufficient wealth, they can be exchanged for alliances, influence, property, position. That is why elopement is so highly charged an issue in the early modern world: children are commodities; they do not own themselves. Elopement is a form of theft. *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* would have looked quite different to Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences from the way they look to us. As I have observed in the essay "Two Household Friends" (in Orgel 2022), *Romeo and Juliet* is about a thirteen year old girl eloping with a fifteen year old boy: the parents in Shakespeare's audience would certainly have found the romance of the play tempered by some quite realistic apprehension. For us, a historically authentic production would probably bring charges of pedophilia.

As for the elopement of Desdemona and Othello, the degree to which it must have been disturbing to Shakespeare's audiences can be measured by the play's efforts to account for and justify it. Though Brabantio denies that he ever had any intention of making

Othello his son-in-law, Desdemona's love for the Moor is clearly an extension of her father's. "Her father loved me, oft invited me. . .", etc. (1.3.128ff.). Othello, moreover, is presented as genuinely irresistible: even the Duke says of his account of the wooing, "I think this tale would win my daughter too" (1.3.171). What is irresistible is his narrative, his command of language and plot; and just as Volpone's power is Jonson's power, Othello's power is Shakespeare's.

But Shakespeare's power is also Iago's, the ability to invent plots and stage scenes, and especially the ability to create entirely plausible fictions. Nor do we know that Iago is the play's only liar: Othello's narratives are beautifully crafted, but are they true? Consider the handkerchief: in the course of the play, he tells two entirely different stories about it. In the first, his mother had it from an Egyptian sorceress who wove it out of sacred silk dyed in mummy conserved of maidens' hearts (3.4.69-75); but in the second, much more mundanely, it was simply a gift his father gave his mother (5.2.216-17). Both stories cannot be true; is the invented one Othello's only lie? Audiences are necessarily trusting souls, and only the playwright can tell us what to believe – are the two handkerchief stories hints that we are being too trusting? Are the stories of Othello's heroic past, the exotic tales that Desdemona fell in love with, true or false? We know that the men whose heads do lie beneath their shoulders are fables, but did Shakespeare know it, and in that case, did Othello know it? Such questions really do get to the heart of the play: the corollary to the question of whether Othello is telling the truth is the much more highly charged question of whether Desdemona is really innocent. Not even Iago believes she is sleeping with Cassio, but maybe Iago's lies are true to some deep dubiousness in the play itself, some deep ambivalence on Shakespeare's part.

There really is some evidence for this, some significant loose ends. In act 2, Othello tells Iago that Cassio was involved in his wooing of Desdemona from first to last; yet at the beginning of the play, when Iago tells Cassio that Othello is married, Cassio is surprised, and claims not to know who the woman is. Is Cassio lying, and is the lie covering something up – is Othello's marriage to Desdemona really a surprise to Cassio? How could it be, if he was in on the wooing? What would make Othello's marriage

unexpected? And in that case, might Iago's great lie, the lie on which the whole plot depends, in fact be the truth? Or shall we say that Shakespeare's plotting is always inconsistent, that he likes loose ends, as when Cassio is initially described as "A fellow almost damned in a fair wife" (1.1.20), but is thereafter unmarried. And do those inconsistencies then perhaps reveal something about Shakespeare's creative imagination: that any narrative contains within it a world of alternative narratives? Might Shakespeare be suspicious of Desdemona and Cassio, too?

Many years ago a deliberately provocative critic named Howard Felperin made a similar suggestion about *The Winter's Tale*: do we really know that Hermione is not guilty?³ Her innocence is confirmed by an oracle, but for a Renaissance Christian audience, the deceptiveness of oracles was a given; to believe in them was to believe in a discredited faith. So at the Globe in 1610, the oracle might have actually seemed evidence confirming Leontes's suspicions. Felperin's suggestion was not intended to rewrite the play, but to unsettle our notions of what we think we know in Shakespeare. After all, the entire resolution of *The Winter's Tale* depends on Leontes's willingness to believe in the miracle of a statue coming to life, a miracle that we know is a lie. Do satisfactory resolutions, then, depend on gullibility, whether the heroes' or the audience's? In *Othello*, we know Iago is not telling the truth, but we only know because he keeps admitting it: how do we assess the veracity of anyone else in the play? This is a continuing issue in *Hamlet*: is the Ghost telling the truth? Hamlet's doubts about the Ghost are both well-founded and culturally justified: Protestant theology denied the existence of ghosts; apparitions were diabolical temptations. The only surprise for an Elizabethan audience might well have been that the ghost turns out to be honest. Much of the action of the play involves setting up a test of the Ghost's story, the production of some credible evidence.

But evidence in Shakespeare is at many critical moments unreliable – tell-tale letters, for example, often turn out to be forged. Should we not expect some of Hamlet's scepticism in *King Lear*, from

3 "Tongue-tied, our Queen?": The Deconstruction of Presence in *The Winter's Tale*", chapter 3 of Felperin 1992.

Gloucester, when presented with a threatening letter purporting to come from his son Edgar, or in *Twelfth Night* from Malvolio finding an extremely unlikely love letter from his mistress Olivia? Why, at the end of *Othello*, is there that litany of documentation, the notes found in Iago's handwriting, the letters found in Roderigo's pocket, that prove Iago's villainy? For whom by this time in the play is the issue in doubt? The answer can only be, for Shakespeare. But do the letters really prove anything? Suppose, like Olivia's love-letter to Malvolio and Edgar's conspiratorial letter to Edmund, the notes found on Roderigo had been forged by Cassio – not an inconceivable plot twist, given the surprise endings of *King Lear* or *The Winter's Tale*. Suppose, without knowing it, Iago was on to something.

Audiences take a great deal on faith, and dramatic plotting, especially in comedy, depends heavily on gullibility. The brief scene in *The Merchant of Venice* in which the clown Launcelot Gobbo persuades his old, blind father that the son he has come to Venice to find is dead might be a touchstone for the play's dramatic strategy. Abstracted from its context, the situation is exceedingly painful. The fact that it is here a comic routine says much about the play as a whole. It is no news that sixteenth-century comedy included a good deal of cruelty, but the comedy here seems especially forced. The scene is over almost before it has begun; it is singularly pointless except as an index to family relations in the play's world. The old father is easy to deceive, being blind; the deception leaves him believing he is bereft of the person he cares most about. His situation is a grotesque version of both Shylock's and Antonio's, the only difference being that Gobbo's tragic loss is almost instantly reversable – and even then, Gobbo has difficulty believing that his son Launcelot is not only alive but has actually been the one playing this painful joke. But compare the moment in the trial scene when Portia and Nerissa hear their husbands declare that they would wish their wives dead if that would preserve Bassanio's beloved Antonio: this is presented as both a joke and a justification for Portia's ring trick. Marriage is always a dangerous business in Shakespeare, but it is rarely so openly a power game. There is surely something chillingly cold-blooded about Portia, more than a vestige of her original in *Il Pecorone*, in which the character is a widow who drugs her suitors and then robs them, and only accepts the Bassanio character on his third try.

Why are these plays set in Venice? Is Shakespeare's and Jonson's Venice even recognisably Venice? Shakespeare's source for *The Merchant* in *Il Pecorone* is set in Venice, which is reason enough for preserving the locale; but Antonio's and Shylock's Venice could easily be London. The only local color, the only place name in the play, is the Rialto, which Shakespeare thinks is the name of a bridge, rather than the name of the district in which the bridge is located. Shakespeare's Venice, moreover, has a significant Jewish population, but no ghetto – the Venetian ghetto had been in existence since 1506. In what sense is this Venice?

Its connection with London is especially striking when we consider Shylock. Despite two centuries of editorial attempts to identify Shylock as a biblical name, it is not Jewish, it is unambiguously English, and had been an English surname since Saxon times. Shylock means "white-haired", like its more common cognates Whitlock and Whitehead, and has never had anything to do with Jews.⁴ The other Jews in the play have obviously biblical names: Tubal, Cush, Leah. Critics have racked their brains over this; but Shylock is, like any number of Shakespeare's clowns and grotesques in exotic locales, onomastically English, and the continuing attempt to confine him in what is surely a critical ghetto, reveals more about us than about Shakespeare. To be brief, there are many parallels to the English Shylock. The Navarre of *Love's Labour's Lost* includes Nathaniel and Costard (the most English of apples); all the Athenian workmen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have English names – Snout, Bottom, Snug, Quince, Flute, Starveling; the Mediterranean duchy of Illyria, roughly the modern Croatia, is home to the relentlessly English Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek; the servants in the Verona of *Romeo and Juliet* are Sampson, Gregory, Peter and Abraham (and no critic to my knowledge has ever claimed that Sampson and Abraham must be Jews); the villain in the Sicily of *Much Ado About Nothing*, a world of Pedros, Leonatos, Claudios, Borachios, is Don John. Shakespeare often wanted his clowns and grotesques to be recognisably English. Why is only Shylock's name a problem for us?

4 For the detailed argument, see Orgel 2003, Chapter 6.

The moneylenders of Shakespeare's England, moreover, were not the Jews, but were anyone with some extra cash, including Shakespeare's father, who in 1570 was indicted for charging excessive interest on a loan, and William Shakespeare himself, who in 1609 was suing for repayment of a loan he had made to a Stratford man. The usury deplored by Antonio may be represented by Shakespeare as Italian, but Shylock's business is as English as his name. If I were hunting for the real Shylock of Shakespeare's imagination, I would look not in Old Testament genealogies, but in the continuing Elizabethan debates on banking and interest – for example, in Thomas Wilson's *Discourse Upon Usury* (1572), and more particularly in R. H. Tawney's masterful long introduction to the modern edition (Wilson 1925). The Shylocks of Shakespeare's world were absolutely ubiquitous; by the end of the sixteenth century they began to be localised in a few groups: goldsmiths, mercers, scriveners. None of these had anything to do with Jews; the association of Jews with usury in England was entirely conventional. Wilson, on the contrary, is convinced that the rise of usury was precisely a function of Protestantism, of Reformation morality and the abandonment of canon law. As Tawney says, "Calvin approached [economic life] as a man of affairs, who assumed, as the starting point of his social theory, capital, credit, large-scale enterprise" (Wilson 1925, 111), and therefore considered borrowing at interest essential. Much of Shylock's language recalls Puritan rhetoric. Shakespeare has little sympathy with Puritanism, but his distaste for it is not a distaste for outsiders.

If Antonio's and Shylock's Venice looks very much like London, Volpone's Venice might as well be the London of *The Alchemist*. In fact, one suspects that Jonson set the play in Venice not because of anything Italian but precisely to avoid London. Consider the date: the play was written very quickly early in 1606 – Jonson says it took him six weeks. It was being performed at the Globe in the spring, so it would have been written at the latest in February and March, directly in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot; the trial of the plotters took place on January 27. Jonson was acquainted with the conspirators, and had been present at least at one of their meetings. When the plot was revealed he was arrested and interrogated, and subsequently served as a government agent to prove his loyalty.

Obviously he felt deeply threatened: he had already been in trouble with the law several times. He had killed an actor in a duel in 1598, and escaped hanging by pleading benefit of clergy (that is, by proving that he was literate); during his time in prison he converted to Catholicism. He had recently again served prison time over passages deemed offensive to the court in the play *Eastward Ho*, of which he was a co-author; and in 1605 was called before the Privy Council on charges of sedition related to his play *Sejanus*.

Therefore in a new play produced in the spring of 1606, one would expect Jonson to tread carefully. So the play is set in Venice, but London is in the air. The cast, in addition to its menagerie of Italian animals, includes the three English travelers, Sir Politic Would-Be and his wife, who have been in Venice for some time, and Peregrine, who has recently arrived from London. Early in the play, Peregrine and Sir Politic meet in the Piazza San Marco, the only place name mentioned in the play. Sir Politic is eager for news from home; he has heard “a most strange thing reported”, and wants details. The strange thing turns out not to be the Gunpowder Plot, the explosive news that is on everyone’s lips both in the audience and throughout Europe, but that a raven has built a nest in one of the English royal ships. Peregrine doubts that Sir Politic can be serious and wonders whether he is being teased, but decides that his countryman really is the fool that he seems, and duly produces a litany of trivia: a lion gave birth in the Tower of London; porpoises were seen near London Bridge; a whale was sighted at Woolwich; accounts of messages hidden by spies in toothpicks and pumpkins are reported; and much more of the same. It is clear that something is being avoided – Jonson’s Venice is the London that dare not speak its name.⁵

As for the Venice of *Othello*, it is even less specific about the city than *The Merchant of Venice* and *Volpone*. Iago is sent to an inn called the Saggitary to fetch Desdemona. That is the only place name mentioned, and it appears to be Shakespeare’s invention. The only element we could call realistic in *Othello*’s Venice is that the city is a melting pot, a world of outsiders. Cassio early in the play is identified as a Florentine – this is one of the things Iago

⁵ The case is made in detail by Dutton 2008.

holds against him; moreover, his given name, Michael, is English. Brabantio's name implies a Burgundian or Netherlandish origin; Iago and Roderigo are Spanish names; but the strangest name of all is Desdemona. This is the only name Shakespeare took from his source in Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, where she is the only named character, and the name appears in the form Disdemona. This invented name – it occurs nowhere else – may derive from the Greek Dis, the god of the Underworld, and daimon, spirit, so Hell-Spirit; or, less melodramatically, from the Greek dys-, bad, and daimon, so ill-fated (as Othello sums her up, “O ill-starred wench”, 5.2.273). In either case, the implications of the name are more ominous than romantic, an embodiment of all Othello's worst fears.

Why, in a play that includes so many unproblematic Italian names (Emilia, Bianca, Gratiano, Lodovico, Montano) did Shakespeare import so many foreigners and retain Disdemona from his source? Are its ominous overtones perhaps part of the point; is Desdemona there as a warning of what is to come, the personification of the dangers of elopement and of Othello's love of danger? “She loved me for the dangers I had passed / And I loved her that she did pity them” (1.3.171-2) – this circular love revolves around danger. As for the name Othello, it is Shakespeare's invention, a diminutive of Otho, and that may have some relevance: the historical Otho's wife, the notorious and dangerous Poppaea, cuckolded Otho with the Emperor Nero, and eventually divorced him to marry the emperor. Otho was sent off to be governor of Lusitania. A decade later Otho briefly became emperor, succeeding Galba in a coup, but reigned only for three months. He was defeated in battle by the invading Vitellius, and committed suicide as Othello does, by stabbing himself.

It is worth noting that Cinthio's story is not even set in Venice. It takes place entirely in Cyprus; we are only told that Disdemona's Venetian family had not wanted her to marry the Moorish captain. The play's Venice, then, relentlessly unspecific as it is, is all Shakespeare. As for Shakespeare's Cyprus, it is not clear when the play's action is imagined as taking place, but by 1606 Cyprus had for 35 years been a Turkish possession. Othello's victorious sea-battle, if it has any objective correlative at all, is an exercise in nostalgia.

Why are these plays set in Venice? It will be observed that there is nothing straightforward about any of these examples – London

audiences are not simply being given a glimpse of a favourite stop on the Grand Tour; the plays are not travelogues. Quite the contrary: foreign places may be dangerous, but the dangers are home-grown. What Shakespeare and Jonson know about Venice is what they know about London.

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Shakespeare *all'italiana*

In early July 2005, when I was in Rome with the Italian Renaissance scholar Michael Wyatt, *La Repubblica* reported on a fashion show. Such a news item would not ordinarily have attracted our attention, but the show was being held in the Globe Theatre in the gardens of the Villa Borghese. A Roman Globe was unknown to us – its full name was originally The Silvano Toti Globe Theatre and is now named for the late director Gigi Proietti; it opened in 2003. A production of *Romeo e Giulietta* was scheduled for a few days later, and we put together a theatre party of six, including three Italian friends.

The theatre is located in what is otherwise a poet's corner for foreign writers – one walks to Shakespeare past life-sized statues of Pushkin, Gogol, the Persian poet Nizami, the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. The theatre itself is in a little grove, scarcely visible from the path; its unpretentiousness and lack of publicity, for someone who has recently been in London – where one is deluged with enticements to what is preposterously called “Shakespeare's Globe” – are very striking. The Roman theatre is indeed modeled on the original Globe, an octagonal timbered building of stucco and wood, and it was built as part of the centenary celebrations of the Villa Borghese. Silvano Toti was a construction magnate with an interest in the arts; he died in 1989 leaving money for a cultural foundation, and it was this that funded the project. The construction of the theatre took three months – *three months*. This is about the time it took to build the original Globe. In contrast, the construction of London's new theatre consumed years, and many millions. The Roman Globe explicitly disclaims any attempt at authenticity; its publicity brochure observes, disarmingly and accurately, that the theatre “must not be considered an imitation of [the 1599 Globe],

for which indeed, there is no extant copy of the original plan”.¹ It also observes that “the theatre, which reproduces the characteristic great wooden O of the original, aims at being a space for both the creativity and fantasy of Italian and foreign artists within a multidisciplinary perspective”, and concludes, unidiomatically but charmingly, that this Globe is “also a stage suited for Elizabethan stagings which take advantage of the happy essence of the architectural plan”.

The interior dimensions of the theatre are about the same as those of London’s Globe, though it holds far fewer people, with a capacity of only 1250 (as opposed to London’s 3000); 420 of these are groundlings. It has a simple, unadorned thrust stage with a curtained discovery space and a large gallery above. The seating is on three levels, and is even more uncomfortable than it is in London, on wooden benches without backs; but the sight lines are far better in Rome: the massive columns supporting the roof in London, which obstruct the view from most of the side seats (and derive not from any evidence about the Globe, but from the surviving drawing of the Swan theatre), in Rome are unobtrusive timber supports, which serve on occasion as trees or other scenic elements. In Silvano Toti’s Globe, there is no reason to insist on a centre seat; the stage is genuinely open, and one sees well from everywhere.

The Roman theatre is better for groundlings, too. In London, because of the fire laws, standees in the pit are forbidden to sit on the ground – on a hot day (or during a boring production) the discomfort is palpable, and performances are preceded by both warnings and apologies. Rome has fire laws too, but the groundlings are welcome to make themselves comfortable by crouching or sitting: safety is assured by the presence of a goodnatured group of burly firemen in full gear, who lounge about visibly at the sides of the auditorium and stroll through the pit during intermissions. The general effect is of an incipient bit of *Much Ado About Nothing* hovering constantly in the wings.

As for the quality of the acoustics, it was difficult to tell, because, unlike the practice of the London Globe, everything is amplified.

1 The brochure can be found at: <https://www.globetheatreroma.com/eventi-aziendali/>.

This is probably not entirely necessary: for about ten minutes during *Romeo e Giulietta* Romeo's microphone stopped working, and he was perfectly audible, even when he was facing away from us – this is not the case in London's Globe. The major disadvantage of the amplification is that it is too uniform, and subtleties of tone disappear; but weighing this against the amount of lost dialogue on London's Bankside, one often felt grateful for the microphones. Doubtless a more sophisticated amplification system could be installed; but one of the charms of the Roman Globe is precisely its unpretentiousness.

Romeo e Giulietta was performed without sets and with very few props, the principal one being a large trunk, which for the wedding night scene served as Juliet's bed, and was then her dowry chest, her bier, and finally her tomb. The cast was young and energetic, and played beautifully as an ensemble. Costumes were simple: black tights for most of the men, more elaborate dresses, mainly black, for the women. There were a few spots of colour – red for the Prince, white for the lovers in the wedding scene – but the production remained visually very simple. The performance, however, was complex and exciting, with very fast pacing; the performing time was just two and a half hours, using a text with no major cuts. Romeo (the only member of the cast with movie star good looks) was a gymnast, running, leaping, climbing up the balcony, nearly always in motion. Giulietta, in a strikingly original performance, looked and acted thirteen. The role, played in this way, made superb sense, and passages that in anglophone productions are commonly cut or truncated, such as Juliet's potion speech, worked beautifully here: the hyperbolic fears were the imagination of innocence and inexperience, and the melodramatic rhetoric came naturally from a thirteen-year-old – for once in this scene, nobody laughed. The Mercutio was superb. The Queen Mab speech, beautifully recited, was played very physically, and at a high-pitched psychological level; his companions seemed completely mesmerised by the performance, so that Romeo's interruption gave the sense of a spell being broken. The Nurse, who was not elderly, but looked to be in her thirties (in the text, she need be no more than twenty-eight: she had a daughter the same age as Juliet, who was born when Lady Capulet was fourteen), played the role throughout in

a tightly wound emotional state, almost as a hysteric; so that the instant reversal, her abandonment of Juliet (“Marry Paris; Romeo’s a dishclout to him”, 3.5.221)² made perfect sense – she was always very close to being out of control, and the performance gave an unusual sense of how dangerous she is in the play, how dependent Juliet is on her, and how ultimately unreliable she is. Juliet’s father, in contrast, was very reasonable, not only when the subject of Juliet’s marriage to Paris was first proposed, but in relation to the family feud generally; and when he went out of control after Tybalt’s death the transformation was all the more powerful.

These actors were not in awe of the text, and made theatrical capital out of things that English productions are typically embarrassed by and cut – Juliet’s potion speech was the most striking example, but almost as surprising was Friar Laurence’s first scene, invariably a bore on the anglophone stage, which was here performed uncut, and at the conclusion received enthusiastic applause. The translation seemed to stay close to the English, and the sonnets remained sonnets, though the Italian speakers among us also noted a certain amount of current slang. The music, oddly, was Elgar.

The director of this thrilling production was the brilliant and prolific Gigi Proietti, who had been active in the Italian theatre for more than 40 years (he died in 2020), and here deliberately assembled a young and largely unknown cast. A search of the internet revealed that by 2005 the glamorous, athletic Romeo, Alessandro Averone, had starred in a short film made in Croatia in 2002, and appeared in a full length film that won a prize at the Montreal film festival in 2004; in addition, he had a single professional stage credit. The extraordinary Giulietta, Valentina Marziali, had been in an Italian production of *Much Ado*, and in one tv film. On the web the great Mercutio, Alessandro Albertin, had no stage credits at all, and appeared only as the co-author of a play. Nadia Rinaldi, the Nurse, had done a good deal of tv; the Friar Laurence, Massimiliano Giovannetti, had made two films. There were star turns in this production, but no stars.³

² All references to *Romeo and Juliet* are from Shakespeare 2012 and will appear parenthetically in the text.

³ The production had originally been done in the theatre’s inaugural

A month later we returned for *La Dodicesima Notte*, *Twelfth Night*, by the same company, but directed by Riccardo Cavallo, and with an entirely different cast, again, with one exception, largely unknown. This production was marvelous, even better than *Romeo e Giulietta* because it was more inventive and adventurous (and the budget was clearly somewhat larger).⁴ It was also quite freewheeling: to begin with, they did not understand the title at all. “La dodicesima notte”, though it is standard in all Italian translations of the play, is not a possible translation of *Twelfth Night*. In English, *Twelfth Night* refers only to the feast of Epiphany, the sixth of January, the twelfth night of the Christmas season – the relevance of the title to the play has been much debated, but its invocation of both the season of feasting and revelry and the concept of revelation, epiphany, is clearly appropriate. “La dodicesima notte” translates into English as *the twelfth night*, with a definite article, and simply means the twelfth in any sequence of nights – nothing to do with Epiphany at all. A correct Italian version of the title would be *L’Epifania*, just as, in French, the play is called *La Nuit des Rois*. Cavallo and his actors missed the reference, took the title in its numerical sense, and interpreted the story as an Arabian Nights tale, making this the twelfth of the 1001 nights. So it was presented in a kind of fairy tale oriental dress, understated but quite beautiful. Sir Andrew was the one exception, in a turquoise variety of Scots tartan, including kilt and beret. Presumably this was an allusion to St. Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland, though his name in the production was Sir Andrea. The presence of a Scot in Illyria, especially a turquoise one, made little sense, but it added to the air of exoticism.

season, in 2003. As of January 2021, there are four brief scenes from that production on YouTube: Romeo and Benvolio (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ea5qDCr4sPo>), the ball scene (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6jEOe1hQxo>), the balcony scene (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIToEOPCyx4>) and Romeo’s death scene (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBE6X-xflZY>).

⁴ I have been able to locate only two stills of the cast of a revival in 2011, <https://static.rbcasting.com/La-dodicesima-notte-878778.jpg>, and <https://abitarearoma.it/globe-theatre-la-dodicesima-notte-o-quel-che-volete-in-scena-l11-settembre/#pid=1>.

The décor was vaguely Moorish. There were two small reflecting pools with fountains, and two minimalist screens, which remained onstage and were used variously throughout. In this languidly sensuous setting, the sexual innuendo of the play became overt. For the opening scene, Orsino recited “If music be the food of love” (1.1.1)⁵ lying on the floor with his servant Valentine, who became Valentina in this production; they were making love. She was bare-breasted, and though he kept his trousers on, it was clear that sex was in progress. So all the praise of Olivia served as a way of getting themselves excited – Valentina enjoys being the go-between; and whenever she returns from her invariably fruitless errands they make fun of Olivia. They clearly both get a charge out of this. Similarly, later, in Cesario’s first scene in Orsino’s court, Valentina has her speech about how quickly he has become the new favorite, but in this production she felt him up while reciting it, and tried to kiss him. This in fact addresses a problem in the play, about why Cesario’s sudden preferment in the household evokes no jealousy. Valentina’s attempt to co-opt the new favourite by making a lover out of him made emotional sense, and dramatically worked very well. More was made of the difficulty of maintaining the cross dressing than is usual in anglophone productions – in the lead-up to “She never told her love”, Orsino walked in on Cesario bathing in one of the pools, though he was so self-involved that he didn’t take a close enough look to catch the reason for his servant’s embarrassment as Cesario grabbed for a robe and, quite naked to the audience, ran across the stage and dressed behind one of the tiny pillars (which of course did not conceal her at all).

As for Olivia, she was played as a kind of society dumbbell, whose love for Cesario comes out of nowhere and about whom everything is exaggeratedly emotional – a figure who would not be out of place in *Dallas* or *Dynasty* (or the Italian soap opera *Un Posto al Sole*). She falls for Cesario because she falls for everyone, except, perversely, the one person who wants her – or says he does – Orsino. Orsino was played as very energetic and forceful, but about nothing, completely unfocused – the continuing love affair with

5 All references to *Twelfth Night* are from Shakespeare 2008 and will appear parenthetically in the text.

Valentina had much more sense of direction than the supposed love for Olivia, or, in the end, than what he professed for Viola: he was Mr Big from *Sex and the City*, a creature of the moment, indulging whatever passion took his fancy.

The comic characters Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria and Feste (Fabian was cut) had the air of old-style vaudevillians among a cast of ingenues. Their performances were, on the whole, the strongest and most professional in the production, and the director used them superbly. One had a sense that, among all these aimless aristocrats, here was one group of characters with both a sense of purpose and a sense of style, louche and raucous but consistent, and consistently funny. The drunken revel of the confrontation with Malvolio, the "Cakes and ale" scene (2.3), was cut, and replaced with a miniature Rossini farce, ten minutes of brilliant, wild invention harnessing the drunken energy to music – the music sounded like real Rossini to me, though apparently it was a pastiche. It was a superb one, totally convincing. Suddenly the play belonged to the clowns – this is what one longs for in the comic scenes, but no anglophone production could get away with this sort of really daring substitution: English performers and audiences are simply too much in awe of the Shakespeare text. These comedians played together beautifully, and often were clearly driving the show; much of the energy of the performance came from them. Sir Toby carried a wine bottle throughout as an attribute. When the twins finally appeared together, he decided he was seeing double, and stumbled across the stage to stow the bottle in one of the pools. A few minutes later, when the doubling was explained, he retrieved the bottle – a nice gag, but also an emblem of how flimsy conversions are in the play.

The pompous and self-conscious Malvolio was one of the best I have ever seen, again brilliantly directed. In the letter scene, to begin with, he had a lot of trouble retrieving the letter – it was stuck to his shoe because of the wax seal. Reading it, he began with a word of gibberish, repeated several times; then, with a sudden recognition, he turned the letter upside down, and the word came out right. (When Olivia was given the letter in the final scene, the joke was repeated.) As Malvolio read the letter, Sir Toby and the conspirators hid behind one of the pool screens, gesticulating, and staying out of sight with difficulty – when Malvolio stumbled over the meaning

of MOAI, Sir Andrew ran out to explain it to him, and had to be dragged back by Maria. Wearing a capacious caftan and a turban, grand-vizier style, this Malvolio was certainly not what Maria calls him, a kind of puritan, but he was a quintessential bureaucrat, parading his authority but revealing nothing except his ambition. The yellow cross-gartered stockings were a surprise, quite invisible until he pulled up his gown to reveal them (so that being required to wear them was singularly pointless). The smiling that accompanied the garters was more than a smile, a compulsive “ho ho ho”, very disconcerting to the dizzy Olivia, constituting yet another event in the play that seemed beyond her control or understanding. In the Prison scene, Malvolio was placed under an open trapdoor, perfectly visible and not in darkness. Feste, however, in a kind of domino, was unrecognisable, miming a deep, oracular voice, disturbing and not at all comic. That scene seemed to come out of nowhere – the introductory dialogue with Sir Toby explaining its point was cut – so that it really only served to justify Malvolio’s vengefulness at the end. And the vengefulness in this production was uncompromising: when Malvolio stalked out, he did not just stalk offstage, he walked through the audience and clear out of the theatre, so there could be no question of pursuing him and making peace. He was gone.

Antonio and Sebastian, the latter young and very attractive, the former middle-aged, were played as overtly gay, but Sebastian seemed to want to move on, nervous about it. Nevertheless, in the recognition scene, when you thought he was going to run to embrace his sister Viola, now unmasked, he instead rushed past her and into Antonio’s arms – this is in the text: Sebastian, catching sight of his friend in the last scene, cries “Antonio, O my dear Antonio, / How have the hours racked and tortured me / Since I have lost thee!” (5.1.213-15), a declaration of continuing love that few anglophone directors can handle. For the finale, when Olivia and Orsino decide they will be as brother and sister, Orsino kissed both Olivia’s hands, and then, very slowly, with Sebastian and Viola looking on dumbfounded, they went into a deep kiss, which they held throughout Feste’s final song. That long kiss was how the play ended.

In this cast, only Sir Toby, Roberto Della Casa, had a substantial number of acting credits, all, to judge from the internet, in film and television. The brilliant Malvolio, Nicola d’Eramo, had appeared in

only three films, including a small part in the original *La Cage aux Folles*. Claudia Balboni, the wonderful Olivia, had been in five stage productions, and is also a director and costumer. The rest of the impeccably professional cast proved to be similarly elusive. Once again, this was a company, not a star turn. It was certainly the most interesting *Twelfth Night* I have ever seen, and one reason it was so strikingly successful was that it took seriously the play's hesitations, surprises and reversals – Orsino instantly proposing marriage to Viola rather than to Olivia; Olivia effortlessly transferring her affections from Cesario to Sebastian; Sebastian transferring his from Antonio to Olivia, and seemingly, at the last moment, back again. In *Hamlet*, written in the same year as *Twelfth Night*, the notion that brothers might be erotically interchangeable is the precipitating subject of the tragedy: the chronicle of Olivia's effortless change of heart is the real play within the play in *Hamlet*. Nor does *Twelfth Night* conclude with what it seems to promise, a group of happy marriages, that defining staple of comedy: the plot, in fact, does not conclude at all, but opens out in its final moments onto a world of new confusions. No anglophone production can ever deal with the ending Shakespeare gives us, which makes the return and reconciliation of Malvolio a prerequisite to the marriage of Orsino and Viola – Shakespeare's script, in an entirely unanticipated plot twist, aborts the traditional comic conclusion. This is a bit of plotting that materialises in the last two minutes of the action, and it needs to be insisted upon because not only performances, but critical accounts of the play, normally ignore it. Riccardo Cavallo, in contrast, made dramatic capital out of it, so that the finale was one of the most original and compelling moments in the performance.

The concluding moments of the play are concerned as much with the plot against Malvolio as with the sorting out of the marriages. Here is what happens in Shakespeare: Orsino declares that he will marry Viola when he sees her in her "woman's weeds" – this means not simply women's clothing, but her own garments, the costume in which we first saw her after the shipwreck, at the beginning of the play. That costume is Viola; nobody suggests that Viola borrow a dress from Olivia, or buy a new one to get married in. But Viola cannot produce her woman's weeds:

The captain that did bring me first on shore
 Hath my maid's garments. He upon some action
 Is now in durance, at Malvolio's suit . . .
 (5.1.269-71)

The captain is in jail, charged by Malvolio with some nameless offense. It is so that Malvolio can be persuaded to withdraw his action against the captain, so that the captain can then return Viola's clothes, that Olivia orders Malvolio to be brought in – this plot twist seems entirely arbitrary, even pointless; but it is all Shakespeare. Malvolio enters, demanding justice for Olivia's supposed letter and his imprisonment, but Feste, unrepentant, only turns the screw, and the business of the sea captain is not mentioned. Olivia takes Malvolio's side, agreeing that "he hath been most notoriously abused"; but Malvolio, quite understandably, storms off, vowing revenge. It is as much Feste's intransigence as Malvolio's indignation that has undone the happy ending, and it is to the point that Feste concludes this sunny comedy with his song about the wind and the rain, about how much comic endings leave unsaid. What happens next is *Hamlet*, and the next time Feste's song appears in Shakespeare the Fool is singing it in the middle of the storm scene in *King Lear*. The end of comedy, Riccardo Cavallo's wonderful production reminded us, is tragedy.

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